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Contents

- ACADEMIC CRITICISM 1271-5, 1280-4, AFRICA 1285-6, ANTHROPOLOGY 1287, BIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIRS 1265-6, CHILDREN'S FICTION 1291, FICTION 1290, MONASTIC HISTORY 1288, PHILOSOPHY 1289, POLITICS 1288-9, PROSOPOGRAPHY AND HISTORY 1263-4, MUSIC 1270
- RICHARD DAVENPORT-HINES**
Lord Blake and C. S. Nicholls (Editors): *The Dictionary of National Biography 1971-1980*
Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle (Editors): *Australian Dictionary of Biography - Volume Ten, 1891-1909*
Lat-Ner
Anthony Slaven and Sydney Checkland: *Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography 1860-1960 - Volume One, The Staple Industries* 1263-4
J. H. Grainger: *Patriotism - Britain 1900-1939* 1264
Donald Prater: *A Ringing Glass - The life of Rainer Maria Rilke* 1265
Karen Ushorne: *"Elizabeth" - The author of "Elizabeth and her German Garden"* 1265
Joe Orion: *The Orion Diaries* 1266
Richard Ingrams: *John Stewart Collis - A memoir* 1266
Wilfrid Blunt: *Slow on the Feather - Further autobiography 1938-1959* 1266
Joseph Heller and Speed Vogel: *No Laughing Matter* 1266
Charles Townshend: *Britain's Civil Wars - Counterinsurgency in the twentieth century*
Noel O'Sullivan (Editor): *Terrorism, Ideology and Revolution - The origins of modern political violence* 1268
Roger Boyes and John Moody: *The Priest Who Had To Die* 1269
Eli Sagan: *At the Dawn of Tyranny - The origins of individualism, political oppression, and the State* 1269
Jacob Katz: *The Darker Side of Genius - Richard Wagner's anti-Semitism* 1270
Crossing the Desert in a Pram (poem) 1271
William Empson: *Essays on Shakespeare* 1271
William Empson: *The Royal Beasts and Other Works* 1272
Charles Hamilton: *In Search of Shakespeare - A study of the poet's life and handwriting*
Laurence Goldstein: *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*
John R. Nabholz: *"My Reader My Fellow-Labourer" - A study of English Romantic prose*
James T. Jones: *Wayward Skeptic - The theories of R. P. Blackmur*
Stirling Haig: *Flaubert and the Gift of Speech - Dialogue and discourse in four "Modern" novels*
Rhiannon Goldthorpe: *Samuel - Literature and theory*
James L. Calderwood: *If It Were Done - "Macbeth" and tragic action*
Savan Beroovitch and Myra Jehlen (Editors): *Ideology and Classic American Literature* 1273
Timothy Peltason: *Reading "In Memoriam"*
David Albright: *Tennyson - The Muses' tug-of-war*
Susan Shatto (Editor): *Tennyson's "Maud" - A definitive edition*
Alan Sinfield: *Alfred Tennyson* 1274
The academic critic and the living writer 1275
American notes 1276
TLS Poets' Progress 1276
Letters on 'The Blind Watchmaker', 'The State of British History', 'The Church in Crisis', etc 127
Author, Author 1277
- Commentary**
Jean Cocteau: *La Machine Infernale* (Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith) 1278
Georges Feydeau: *Scenes from a Marriage* (Barbican Theatre) 1278
Alfred de Musset: *Hidden Fires* (Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow) 1278
Peking Opera: *Havoc in Heaven. The Complexion of Peach Blossom* (Sadler's Wells) 1279
John Mortimer: *Paradise Postponed* (Thames Television) 1279
Graham Sutherland: *The Early Years 1921-1940* (Goldsmiths' Gallery) 1279
- Absence into presence: changes in literary criticism** 1280
Terry Keefe: *French Existentialist Fiction - Changing moral perspectives* 1280
Samuel Beckett: *The Complete Dramatic Works*
Enoch Brater (Editor): *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*
Richard Ellmann: *Samuel Beckett - Nayman of Noland*
Linda Ben-Zvi: *Samuel Beckett*
Michael Sheringham: *Beckett - "Molloy"*
John Calder, Martin Esslin, Billie Whitelaw, David Warrow and others: *As No Other Dare Fail - In Samuel Beckett on his 80th birthday* 1281-2
Edgar Harden: *Thackeray's "English Humourists" and "Four Georges"* 1283
Michael Williams: *Jane Austen - Six novels and their methods*
Caroline Austen: *Reminiscences*
J. David Grey (Editor): *The Jane Austen Handbook* 1284
Words for Horatio (poem) 1284
Basil Davidson: *The Story of Africa*
Ali Mazrui: *The Africans - A triple heritage*
Martin Meredith: *The First Dance of Freedom - Black Africa in the postwar era*
Sanford J. Ungar: *Africa - The nations and people of the secret continent* 1285-6
Kenneth Ingham: *Jan Christian Smuts - The conscience of a South African* 1286
James C. Scott: *Weapons of the Weak - Everyday forms of peasant resistance* 1287
Peter Sutton and Laïse Hercus (Editors): *This is What Happened - Historical narratives by Aborigines* 1287
Philip Rousseau: *Pachomius - The making of a community in fourth-century Egypt* 1288
Lyn Rodley: *Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia* 1288
Fergus Kerr: *Theology after Wittgenstein*
Joseph Runzo: *Reason, Relativism and God* 1289
Hao Wang: *Beyond Analytic Philosophy - Doing justice to what we know* 1289
Mario Vargas Llosa: *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* 1290
Eduardo Quiruga: *On Foreign Ground* 1290
Alberto Moravia: *The Voyager* 1290
Pier Paolo Pasolini: *The Ragazzi* 1290
Lilla Kravitz: *Composition with Dark Centre* 1291
Clive King: *The Sound of Propellers* 1291
Garry Kilworth: *Witchwater Country* 1291
Janni Howker: *Isaac Canning* 1291
Index of books reviewed 1291
Among this week's contributors 1292
Information, please 1292
- COVER PICTURE**
J. J. Lequeu's "Ho Is Tree", 1798-99, is reproduced from *Lequeu: An architectural enigma* by Philippe Daverio, which will be published on November 24 by Thames and Hudson (367pp, £50, 0-500-34095-1). The book is illustrated with 130 black and white illustrations.

All sorts and conditions

Richard Davenport-Hines

LORD BLAKE and C. S. NICHOLLS (Editors)
The Dictionary of National Biography 1971-1980
1,010pp, Oxford University Press. £60.
0198652089

BEDENAIRN and GEOFFREY SERLE (Editors)
Australian Dictionary of Biography
Volume Ten: 1891-1939, Lat-Ner
680pp, Melbourne University Press. A\$35.
0552843271
(0552842364 the set)

ANTHONY SLAVEN and SYDNEY CHECKLAND
Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography
1860-1960
Volume One: The Staple Industries
476pp, Aberdeen University Press. £44.
0080303986

The latest supplement to the *Dictionary of National Biography* is a glorious medley. But for its price, it would be an ideal purchase for everyone with curiosity about human character, motive and achievement, or with a taste for good prose. Almost without exception, all of its 748 entries are vivacious and stylish; there can be few books exceeding one thousand pages which are so consistently well written, instructive and amusing. Lord Blake and C. S. Nicholls have marshalled talented contributors, whom they have treated with finesse. The resultant book is not perfect, but like the careful *Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography 1860-1960* by Anthony Slaven and Sydney Checkland, it is unsurpassable within the aims set it.

One of the joys of the *DNB*, imparted by its Oxford base, is its tendency to delicate spite, dry periphrasis or oblique understatement. A dowager marchioness who ran the Women's Royal Voluntary Service is not called a battle-axe, but a "large woman with a deep voice and powerful personality" who "maintained an extensive network of political and official contacts which she used resolutely to achieve her objects". A constitutional historian of formidable but narrow industry, devoted to academic committees, "knew little in the way of relaxation", while "in times of stress a ruthless streak emerged which gave a Torquemada cast to his normally smiling features". An actress remembered as "infinitely kind, unassuming and intensely professional, but increasingly disturbed" was "never slender, or good-looking".

For those who relish this sort of quiddity, the *DNB* remains as scintillating and unpredictable as Aubrey's *Brief Lives*.

There are treasures here like Lord Henniker's account of Sir Edmund Hall-Patch, the jazz saxophonist who became principal economic adviser to the Foreign Office, celebrated for his black pessimism and histrionic manners, and the butt of some of the best Ernie Bevin anecdotes ("Send for 'all-Patch': 'ell make your flesh creep"). There are examples of marvellous fortitude. Sir Rupert Cross, blind from infancy, whose legal textbook on *Evidence* was a masterpiece of precision, transforming a jumble of doctrines and statutes into an academic discipline, "enjoyed life immensely, though he would remark ironically that it was bearable only so long as he knew where the next bottle of champagne was coming from". To the contrary, Stevie Smith complained that "being alive is like being in enemy territory". For both, in truth, daily survival was an act of courage. Determination of another kind was evinced by a woman tennis champion, whose record of nineteen Wimbledon titles stood unbroken for over forty years, and who was so anxious, as she said, to take her record to the grave that she died at Wimbledon when it became clear that Billie-Jean King was at last going to break it.

It is interesting to chart the dictionary's attitudes towards stigmas. Predictably, early volumes of the *DNB* were evasive or obfuscatory in treating homosexuals, omitting the humanitarian and parliamentary reformer, Henry Grey Bennet, and eliding mention of ostracism or exile, as with William Banks, William Beckford, Richard Heber and Sir William Meredith. Since the 1960s this attitude has relaxed, and the present volume is distinctive for its candid and casual treatment of homosexuality. Other sexual inhibitions survive, and though much play is made of the "vagaries" of "the latest representative of an otherwise extinct race of bachelor don", his propensity for solitary sex in parks and swimming-pools is disregarded.

The new taboo is alcohol. Many of the subjects in this volume had lives dominated or ruined by drink, but it is exceptional for this to be even hinted. John Pudney's addiction is described, Jean Rhys "underwent dark periods - some of them very dark - in which she drank", and it is said of Reginald Maundling that "the events of 1964 left him jaded". But there are many others whose careers were transformed or foreshortened by alcoholic

poisoning, whose difficulties are not detailed. It is doubtful that the editors resolved to spare the feelings of surviving family by imposing discretion over dipsomania, but many contributors have done so. Other forms of addiction are confronted honestly: Paul Giambutini is the first contributor to the *DNB* to use the phrase "cold turkey". For long-term *DNB* trend-spotters, it will be fascinating to see how long it tries to sustain the illusion that alcohol is a largely innocuous, mass-recreational drug, while other illicit or innovative drugs are viewed as especially evil or marginal aberrations. As more subjects of the dictionary become used to varied forms of intoxicification, this pretence will seem as antique as earlier suppression of homosexuality.

Excellent though the present volume is within its own terms (not least for the greater amplitude given to sources), the remit of its editors is questionable. As conceived by its founder, George Smith, and executed by the early editors, Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, the *DNB* bestowed "great pains" on identifying and including "names of less widely acknowledged importance" and tried to "embrace comprehensively all branches of the nation's activity". Preliminary lists of subjects of the dictionary were printed in the *Athenaeum*, for criticism or amplification by its readers, and the editors interpreted their duties so that articles on great prelates and politicians jostled with those on a forger like William Dodd, or a murderer like Samuel Goode. Elizabeth Hanbury was included because she lived to the age of 108, and two columns were devoted to Sir John Dineley, an eighteenth-century poor knight of Windsor, simply to commemorate his artifice to win a wife. The inclusion of such entries was not frivolous: it satisfied the editors' object of reflecting all aspects of British life, and established the *DNB*'s reputation as a true national record rather than just another universal dictionary of celebrities. The pursuit by Stephen and Lee of "less widely acknowledged" names was crucial to the acclaim with which the *DNB* was met.

George Smith's widow, as owner, and Sidney Lee, as editor, of the first *DNB* supplement covering deaths between 1901 and 1911, continued this policy, but later decennial supplements were "planned on less ample lines", as the editors of the 1912-21 volume explained. Lee's swan-song, the Edwardian volume, included 1,660 lives and extended to 2,035 pages; it was determined in the 1920s, on grounds of economy, both to reduce the average length of

articles and to operate a stricter policy of selection. Though this was possibly justified at the time, it has derogated from the usefulness of the *DNB*, and the reason offered for this revised policy is now obsolete. Explaining their increased selectivity in the 1920s, the editors wrote that "continuation on [Lee's] scale would [place future volumes] beyond the means of most of those for whose use such a work is primarily intended". The private scholars, antiquarian clergy and bookish barristers who were the bedrock of the *DNB* supporters in the 1920s, even if they survive in any numbers, could not afford £60: the volume far exceeds their means, and is now sustained mostly by library sales. It is time to revert to the more spacious and rewarding model conceived, to their eternal glory, by Smith and Stephen.

If the object remains to commemorate those who made a "definite contribution to the annals of their generation", to quote the introduction of the volume for 1922-30, it is extraordinary to have had no entries on Hawley Crippen, Brian Hanratty, Ruth Ellis or Stephen Ward, each of whom made more "contribution to the annals of their generation" than most bishops or admirals. The occasions when past editors have shown latitude, as in Sir Edgar Williams's admission in the 1950s of the coxswain of Cromer lifeboat, Henry Blagg, have enhanced the book.

There is no better vindication of a catholic but discriminating approach than the triumphant progress of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, edited by Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle. The *DNB*'s Australian counterpart is differently arranged, and has so far only reached the tenth volume, but comparison is arresting. Without being either sentimental or vulgar, the Australians have a demotic bias to some of their entries which makes their dictionary richly satisfying. The *ADB*, as with the old *DNB*, is truly a national record and a suggestive piece of social history. According to Carlyle, "history is the essence of innumerable biographies", and the Australian approach is not only consummate from a literary standpoint, but historically more authentic. A few paragraphs on Tilly Devine, brothel-keeper and razor-slasher of Wollomooloolo, or "Yabba" Gascoigne, door-to-door salesman of dressed rabbits and stentorian heckler at Test matches (described as "rabbito and barracker"), or Harold Chumleigh (otherwise Harold Vere Chommondeley de Chumleigh), regimental sergeant-major and Lothario, are worth columns on Robert Menzies if one of the purposes

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of national prosopography is to capture the essence of national spirit and human motive.

One of the most laudable characteristics of the Australian dictionary is the pains taken to identify and celebrate obscure heroes of the First World War. The cumulative effect is as deadly as those other masterpieces of prosopography, the biographical footnotes to Martin Gilbert's biography of Winston Churchill, which record every father, brother, nephew or son killed in action during a century of war of everyone mentioned in the text. The carnage and courage recorded in these Australian articles are macabre and distressing. "His mates did not forget", it is recorded of a labourer called Clem Garratt buried at Abbeville in 1918: "tall, fair, strong-looking, brave, honest and forthright . . . sixty-one years after his death his name brought an old comrade to tears". The Australian dictionary is never complacent or chauvinist (Joshua Bell is described as having "an unerring instinct for the correct word seldom found among Australian politicians"), but is a wonderful epitome of national identity.

The *DNB* supplements, in contrast, have been niggardly in their recognition of young war dead. A few holders of the VC, like Warneford, and a few writers killed prematurely, like Julian Grenfell or Robert Byron, are commemorated, but overall the tribute is small. It is sad that the new volume scarcely records the Ulster civil war. There is an entry on Field Marshal Baker, and another on a civilian victim of Irish assassins, Ross McWhirter, but it is shocking to have no account of younger actors in the Irish drama, neither the captivating Robert Nairne, nor a representative terrorist, nor an innocent victim of sectarian violence. It seems inevitable that a future volume covering the Falklands war will contain an entry on Colonel H. Jones; but it will be equally apt to recall other combatants, such as David Tinker, who were not glorified by the encomia of Ministry of Defence publicists.

The gaiety and affection of the Australian dictionary reflects the iconoclasm and generosity of Australian life. Similarly in only one country in the world would the editor of a national biographical dictionary open the introduction to his first volume with a sentence

so strident, insecure and contentious as W. J. de Koeck in 1968: "In South Africa, as in all civilized countries, students and scholars have long felt the need for a work of reference presenting the life histories of all those . . . since the earliest European contact with the southern extremity of Africa." Most editors are not so edgy in asserting the civilization to which they belong, and the *Dictionary of South African Biography*, though sound and scholarly, is so tortuously organized that it becomes increasingly unworkable with each new volume. Some may see political parallels in this.

What of the civilization to which Lord Blake and Christine Nicholls belong? It is one in which science, medicine and engineering enjoy far greater respect than is admitted by those who assert that Britain has been enervated by excessive devotion to the humanities. It is one where the secret service is seen to have made an equal contribution to each of the three armed services, where architecture is little esteemed and, perhaps unexpectedly, where there is only a confused and exiguous tradition of philanthropy. It is a secular society, where religious leaders are better noted for their social ambitions or administrative capacity than sanctity. Only 15 per cent of the entries are of women (of whom almost one-third were writers), which, however, represents an increase over two decades ago.

For many years the weakest categories of entry in the *DNB* were of business men. Proportionately they were under-represented, and they were seldom described with insight or originality. The bland generalities on the career of Lord Dalziel of Wooler (died 1928) were lifted from a *Times* obituary which told nothing of the tergiversations by which he amassed his millions. The long career as a speculator of Lord D'Abernon (died 1941), which precipitated a major European financial crisis in 1895 and almost bankrupted a British prime minister in 1915, is treated in two sentences. This deficiency is remedied in the new volume, which covers idealistic business men (witness Sir Edward Abraham's account of the humane and delightful Sir Harry Jephcott) and scoundrels. Ian Waller's shrewd analyses of two businessmen ennobled by Harold Wilson, Lords Brayley and Plenderden, are exemplary, as is the masterful account of Sir Denis



Members of the London Welsh Society before their annual St David's Day dinner in 1929; from *Clothes: A history in photographs, 1850s to the present day* (48pp. Macdonald, £5.95, 0356 11395 7).

Lowson, albeit following a *Times* obituary famous for pioneering frankness in treating City malfeasance.

It was partly to remedy the *DNB*'s neglect of business men that in 1979-80 the then Social Science Research Council funded projects for two separate biographical dictionaries of entrepreneurs since 1860. Five volumes, covering England and Wales, edited by David Jeremy and Christine Shaw, were published in 1984-6 (Volume One reviewed in the *TLS*, April 16, 1984), and are now followed by the first of two volumes covering Scotland. The Scottish dictionary is arranged thematically, with the present volume devoted to entrepreneurs in the staple industries, and subdivided into further categories, such as metals, engineering, shipbuilding, chemicals and textiles, with each sector introduced by a workmanlike editorial essay. It has a heavy regional flavour, is concerned to provide a quantitative synthesis of the personal, cultural and technological components of entrepreneurship and to stimulate investigation of elites. Meticulous scholarship was involved in writing these biographies, often from incomplete sources, and

they are usually convincing and competent, although in comparison with the *DNB*'s exactitude on titles and precedence, the Scottish business historians (like their English colleagues) are deplorably adrift. Scotland's dictionary received financial support from Scottish businesses as well as the SSRC, and partly for this reason was a less rushed performance than its English counterpart: in consequence its format and quality are more consistent, and its typesetting is more accurate. In both cases prosopography, and academic standards, suffered from the insistence on quick returns by SSRC paymasters.

One of the Scots' strengths is that, like the Australians, they satisfy Lytton Strachey's requirement of biography, by shooting "a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined". It will further adorn the *DNB* if its future decennial supplements strive towards the same end, and illumine some dim alcoves which were as much part of our times as the Cabinet Room or Lambeth Palace. At £60 the *DNB* is already a luxury: a little more and it would be a perfect luxury.

Large and little Englanders

Alan Sykes

J. H. GRAINGER
Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939
411pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul, £19.95,
0710209177

This is a strange, difficult book, reminiscent both in style and concepts of those extended essays through which eminent Victorians sought to inform and reform the public mind. There is a similar assumption of knowledge, an abundance of French, German and Latin terms, a preference for allusion over explanation. The reference to Edwardian imperialist movements as "state-making", for example, depends on Matthew Arnold's "continental" conception of the state as "the nation in its collective and corporate capacity . . . controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals". The difference is that Arnold explains his particular meaning. J. H. Grainger does not. The deficiency is too often typical of his approach.

The years 1914-39, a study in themselves, are here reduced to a brief, rather cursory epilogue to a study of late-Victorian and Edwardian patriotisms. Superficially, the theme is simply that of diversity, the images of England held by a perplexity of patriots, including not only the obvious imperial statesmen, their poets and their leagues, but the education system, rural patriots like George Sturt, "Little England" liberals and radicals, and even that obscure egotistical clerk, Arthur Bourwood. Regarded as a series of essays around a central theme, individual chapters are interesting, informative and intelligible. The concept of patriotism is, however, so generalized that the lines of discrimination become blurred. On this basis there are no reasonable grounds for devoting a chapter to Balfour, while ignoring Shaw or G. D. H. Cole.

Patriotisms is more subtle than this. Buried beneath the simple fact of multiplicity, traces of a sophisticated, well-conceived argument

can be discerned. The book is also a study of the interaction of two forms of patriotic temperament, one incumbent and passive, attached to an already existing, "given" England of liberal, parliamentary traditions, which provided, according to Burke, "the greatest variety of ends and is the least likely to surrender one to the other or to the whole", where change comes naturally as "the next thing to do"; the other an oppositional "active" patriotism of reason and design, a "state-making", reorganizing patriotism in which individual variety is sacrificed to a single priority. The difficulty is presentation. The argument is a framework of interpretation ordering disparate material, nor does it provide a principle of selection. It is merely signposted by recurring phrases in the text, the significance of which becomes clear only when it is too late. Other common factors such as the persistent rural imagery of passive patriots and the equally rural designs of active patriots pass unnoticed. Grainger makes no comment on Chesterton's central observation that English patriotism is attached to the flag and not to the soil, a remark that cries out for discussion. Above all, there is no conclusion, no drawing together of the threads, such as they are, no attempt to explain the meaning of it all. Reading this book is a process of gradually dawning but always partial comprehension, a patient struggle towards a clarification that never comes.

Nevertheless, it is a book which should be read by anyone interested in Edwardian history. The novel perspective throws fresh light on a great deal of familiar territory, and beyond. Paradoxically, the sheer difficulty of discovering the author's intentions is a great stimulus to thought. It is possible to unearth the beginnings of a classification of patriotisms, both left and right, and a recondite populist patriotism. What is not clear is whether this is intentional, accidental, or whether it is imposed order from outside. This work of such polished opacity that whatever the reader discovers within it may in many cases be no more than the reflection of his own mind.

The Santa Claus of loneliness

Theodore Ziolkowski

DONALD PRATER
A Ringing Glass: The life of Rainer Maria Rilke
472pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, £25,
019815755 X

How does one write the biography of a poet whose goal it was, like "bees of the invisible", to internalize all external reality? From the moment when Rilke discovered his vocation – around the age of thirteen at the military academy to which he had been sent following the break-up of his parents' marriage – he dedicated his life to the search for the pure space where, in the words of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, he could resonate like "a ringing glass". With ruthless single-mindedness he determined to live for his art, not from it. Accordingly, he spent his life on the lookout for patrons who would provide the circumstances he required. In widening gyres that led outwards from Prague, where he was born in 1875, he circled Europe – from Munich to Berlin, from Moscow to Paris, from Rome to Copenhagen, from North Africa to Spain – until he found that *Wilmannsheim* in the tower-like chateau at Maut where he spent the last years of his life (1921-26), not a hundred miles from that other tower of introspection that C. G. Jung was

building for himself at Bollingen.

If the place-names in Rilke's biography mark the stages of his eccentric *Bildungsreise*, the index of persons looks like a Mitteleuropæan social register. In addition to the leading figures of German culture, he also met the most glittering stars of the European intellectual firmament. Tolstoy strolled with him and Lou Andreas-Salomé in the park at Yasnaya Polyana. (The Countess, in a bad temper, refused to welcome the unannounced guests in the house.) He served for several years as amanuensis to an often capricious Rodin. Later he became acquainted with Roland, Gide and Valéry. But it is mainly the women who surround him protectively, as they envelop the unicorn in the tapestries that Rilke lovingly described. Four women were bonded to him in a kind of electromagnetic tension throughout his life: his mother Phia, who dressed him as a girl and made him kiss the wounds of wooden Christ-figures; the maternal Princess Marie of Thurn and Taxis, whose castle at Duino catalysed the first of the great elegies; the brilliant Lou, who refused to be drawn into anything more binding than a sisterly relationship but whose tough-minded intellect triggered the transformation suggested by the change of his name from René to Rainer; and his wife, the sculptress Clara Westhoff, to whom he remained loyal even though his need for solitude precluded any sort of life together. Beyond these four, moreover, Rilke was nurtured by

some of the most talented, beautiful women of the age, who harboured on their estates or in their apartments this quiet vegetarian who in most cases deflected any demanding love into an unthreatening sisterly affection.

Nor can this rather shapeless life be monitored with reference to current events. Rilke boasted of never reading newspapers, except occasionally the *feuilleton*. The social and political turmoil of his lifetime intruded on his inner space only once. In August of 1914, like many other artists, he was caught up in the general euphoria of the war for long enough to write a series of five martial "hymns". But six months in the army – Private Rilke in his ill-fitting uniform peering morosely from beneath his kepi was surely the most improbable soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army – disabused him of any illusions, even though he spent his entire service at a post no more perilous than the War Archives in Vienna.

It sometimes looks as though the man whom Auden called "The Santa Claus of loneliness" spent more time interviewing prospective "guardians of his solitude" than actually enjoying it. Donald Prater's biography introduces over 400 friends and acquaintances to whom Rilke spilled out his longing and to whom he turned for financial support: to pay for his compulsive travels, for his daughter's schooling, for the de luxe hotels that he favoured, for favourite toiletries, for the leatherbound address books that he kept filling. And he wrote so many letters that he spoke of his "letter-factory": "it goes by the metre, if not the kilometre", he boasted in 1921 – and the fifty volumes of correspondence so far published in fact amount to more than a metre of books on the library shelf.

It is through these letters rather than through his actions that Rilke shaped his life, as deliberately as any of his poems, and Prater has used them skillfully to construct his densely textured (and richly illustrated) biography.

which sensibly threads its way between the extremes of adulation and revisionism that characterized earlier waves of Rilke studies. From the available biographical sources as well as unpublished materials he includes many striking details – from the young Rilke starting the Swedish peasants who came across him strolling nude through the forests at Furuborg, to the elderly poet uneasily adjusting to the fact that he had become a grandfather: "Mais j'ai peu de talent." We also hear perhaps too much about his continual financial worries and housing problems.

Yet there remains something inherently paradoxical about the "life" of a poet that deliberately excludes the "works", as Prater has chosen to do. A poet is not a man of action who lives through his deeds. If we are to believe that Rilke was not simply a cultural connoisseur, if we are to understand his magical power of attraction, then we require the justification of the works as they developed from the derivative if skilful early verse by way of the *Edelkutsch* of the *Lay of the Cornet Christoph Rilke* through the brilliant musicality of the *New Poems* and the enchanting prose of *Matte Laurids Brigge* to the sublimity of the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. But here we are asked to take everything on faith, as in one of those talk-shows where the "celebrity" of the hour claims our attention merely because he or she happens to be there. Apart from occasional quotations Prater has little to say about the poetry without which Rilke's life appears to be mindless jet-setting before the fact. (The paradox is compounded by the irony that Rilke's German poetry is quoted in English translation: the only verses cited in the original are his French poems.) In 1907 Rilke wrote to one of his lovely admirers: "I am in work like the kernel in the fruit." In Prater's excessively detailed biography we have the often cloyingly sweet fruit, but all too little of the solid, generative kernel.

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Two on a see-saw

Tony Gould

JOE ORTON
The Orton Diaries
 Edited by John Lahr
 304pp. Methuen. £12.50.
 0413496600

All couples are unequal, but some couples are more unequal than others. As John Lahr's perceptive introduction to *The Orton Diaries* demonstrates, Joe Orton's success as a playwright served to highlight his partner Kenneth Halliwell's failure; and since their relationship had begun with the boot very much on the other foot, with Halliwell as Orton's mentor, this failure was doubly hard to bear.

To keep a diary was in itself a provocation. Orton and Halliwell lived in a room 16 feet by 12 feet. Lahr writes, "The bulk of the diaries were written virtually under Halliwell's nose. They were kept in a red-grained leather binder in the writing-desk where Halliwell could – and did – read their punishing contents."

The period covered by the diary is short: some seven or eight months; the last months, as it turned out, of Orton's and Halliwell's lives. On August 9, 1967, Halliwell put an end to his partner's career and his own misery by, first, bashing Orton's brains in and then swallowing twenty-two Nembutals. He left a note saying, "If you read his diary all will be explained. K.H. PS. Especially the latter part."

Does the diary explain it all? As much, perhaps, as can be explained. Certainly the portrait of Halliwell that emerges is not a flattering one: he comes over as a moaner, a hypochondriac, inept at arranging even the trivial thing, such as buying a strap for his suitcase, and grotesquely gauche. Orton could shock people and get away with it because of his charm and good looks. Halliwell had neither, and his efforts to shock – for instance, by sporting an Old Etonian tie to which he had no right – backfired horribly.

Not so little victim

Craig Brown

WILFRID BLUNT
Slow on the Feather: Further autobiography
 1938–1959
 270pp. Wilton: Michael Russell. £12.95.
 0859551550

No other British school can have given rise to such a large body of books as Eton. In numerous footnotes, Wilfrid Blunt gradually reveals that he has read most of them, and with apparent enthusiasm. "It takes a brave man to write about Eton in terms other than of unquestioning worship. A brave man – or a fool?", he writes in his own quirky contribution to the genre. Though obviously no fool, neither is Blunt an agnostic: the few questions he raises are whispered half-heartedly. The hearty choice of title ("we'll still swing together / And swear by the best of schools") is the ending of the verse in "The Eton Boating Song" from which it comes) gains added reverence when the author reveals himself as avowedly anti-sport.

Slow on the Feather, this second volume of Blunt's autobiography, concerns the twenty-one years he spent as the senior art master at Eton. Much of it is taken up with the same mixture of anecdotes about slightly eccentric friends, and the languid ripostes to the twentieth century, that makes the *Lytelton* – *Hard-Davis Letters* so attractive to some, so off-putting to others. George Lytton himself comes in for a few of these "quaint old character" reminiscences:

Going round his house one evening he surprised a boy dressed in pyjamas but wearing his cap. "Why the fancy dress?" (I can still exactly recall the rich, Johnsonian tone of his voice). "I'm saying my prayers, sir." George had momentarily forgotten that the boy was a Jew.

Funny, offensive or inconsequential? – those of a different background and generation from the author's might find that even a genial tone cannot conceal the lolling, lolling bar opin-

As if it wasn't enough to know he was a failure, he now had the evidence written down daily, and dispassionately, by the person closest to him, the only person he loved. In addition, Orton used the diary to keep (and sometimes embroider?) a record of his sexual conquests. He was the virile one, these pages assert *ad nauseam*, and the only person he didn't seem able to have sex with was Halliwell himself – though Halliwell was willing enough.

When they went to stay for a weekend near Brighton with the theatre producer, Oscar Lewenstein, just a fortnight before their deaths, Orton found Halliwell reading Auden. Did Halliwell perhaps light upon the couplet, "If equal affection cannot be, / Let the more loving one be me?" If he did, he must have been tempted to compare his situation with Auden's and reflect that while Auden, after all, was a great poet as well as a homosexual, an acknowledged success in life if not in love, he himself was merely midwife to another's art, a success neither in life nor in love. Even his (considerable) part in Orton's success got no public recognition. On the contrary, he was almost universally denigrated as a worthless appendage. No wonder, then, that he became suicidally, not to say murderously, depressed.

Yet the diary, though no doubt devastating for him to read, ironically gives him some of the status denied him in life. No one who reads it – or indeed, John Lahr's excellent biography of Orton, *Prick Up Your Ears*, which drew heavily on it – could fail to see Halliwell's importance in Orton's life as a creative artist. The one man Orton couldn't fuck was also the one man he couldn't live without.

The story is fascinating, but the diary less so. Orton writes of Beverley Nichols's *A Case of Human Bondage*: "I find it a book, although difficult to put down, easy not to pick up." The same could be said of this book, especially the Tangier section, with its relentless procession of bum-boys. Orton himself complains that "even sex with a teenage boy becomes monotonous. Ecstasy is as liable to bore as boredom." Egotism, too, can become a little wearisome.

Blunt does not care for modern art, or most women ("I am totally prejudiced and unreasonable where women and dogs are concerned, having in my time been bitten by both"), or fellow masters "lapsing into matrimony"; there are occasions, however, when this honesty veers too close to pride.

But there is another side to Blunt's life, and to his autobiography, that prevents both from being enveloped in crust. "Some account of the problems that face a homosexual schoolmaster could possibly be of help to others similarly handicapped through no fault of their own", he explains. The passages on his homosexuality have the directness of J. R. Ackerley, though with little of Ackerley's self-loathing. An experience with a Moroccan boy in Marrakesh convinced Blunt "that I was not, basically, a repressed boy-lover: that for sex I needed an adult homosexual partner".

His reflections on his sexuality are separated from the rest of the autobiography both by chapters and by style: a melancholy tension replaces chatty bonhomie. Had the curiosity of the former managed to creep into the anti-intellectualism of the latter, an analysis of the peculiar power of Eton might have been written, from a genuinely off-beat point of view.

Blunt's final chapter is entitled "My Brother Anthony: A postscript." It is a touching and immensely warm-hearted attempt to reconcile his younger brother Anthony's treachery with the character he knew and loved for seventy years. Though he has read Anthony Blunt's 30,000-word memoir, he "found little meat in it", and, as the brothers did not directly discuss the treachery, his excuses run along traditional lines. Wilfrid's love of Anthony is such that at times he misjudges the effect that an anecdote might have on the reader. When Wilfrid sent his brother a copy of his biography of G. F. Watts, together with a note saying that if he did not want to keep it, he could pass it on to the Courtauld Library, Anthony replied that he would do just this, as his own shelves were already overcrowded. "I am sure he did not mean to be wounding", writes Wilfrid.

Seeing it whole

David Profumo

RICHARD INGRAMS
John Stewart Collis: A memoir
 157pp. Chatto and Windus. £10.95.
 070112976X

In terms of his literary status, what are we to make of John Stewart Collis? In this brief but objective tribute, Richard Ingrams is in no doubt that he remains "a one book man" for most readers, that work being *The Worm Forges the Plough* (1973), itself a conflation of two earlier books concerning the six years during the 1940s that he spent as an agricultural labourer. Many regard this as the classic evocation of a lost order of rural England, but certain admirers saw Collis in a wider context: Arthur Calder-Marshall hailed him as "the most neglected master of English prose living today", while Stephen Potter (admittedly, his best friend) put him as a writer in the same league as Ruskin.

As well as the numerous pieces of journalism that he contributed to the *Spectator* during the last years of his life, Collis was the author of nineteen books, yet when Ingrams first met him in his eighties he was only just achieving proper recognition. Following the success of his first book, *Shaw* (1925), Collis was largely ignored until the reissue of his two farming books; even in his seventies his autobiography *Bound Upon a Course* (1971) was first rejected by twelve publishers though he had already written biography (patchy), fiction (poor) and several works of outstanding natural philosophy.

Ingrams is not much concerned with critical reassessment, but finds fascinating the enigmatic personality behind this diverse corpus: Collis was always cagey about his own life – even the autobiography is evasive at crucial points – but Ingrams manages to make coherent a character who might otherwise emerge like some fictional invention cobbled together by a novelist unskilled in psychological plausibility; for Collis's personal decisions seem to derive from no logic. Born in 1900 into comfortable Irish circumstances, educated at Rugby, briefly a soldier, he was determined to be a

Out of control

N. S. Sutherland

JOSEPH HELLER and SPEED VOGEL
No Laughing Matter
 335pp. Cape. £10.95.
 0224024124

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a rare illness in which the peripheral nerves cease to function. It becomes impossible to move the muscles controlled by the nerves affected and there is a loss of sensation in parts of the body. In severe cases, patients have to be placed on a respirator, sometimes for many weeks, since they cannot move their own lungs. Most patients recover, though usually with some residual loss of muscular control.

Four years ago the novelist Joseph Heller succumbed to this disease. Within twenty-four hours of the premonitory symptoms, he found himself in an intensive care unit, where he spent twenty-two days. He was in hospital for nearly six months and despite working extremely hard at the exercises that aid recovery, he was far from having regained his former agility three years later. One can understand the temptation to write about such a horrifying experience.

Unfortunately, only a small part of *No Laughing Matter* is devoted to the illness, and little even of that is either interesting or informative. Heller writes, oddly, of "the anxiety and latent terror that I unconsciously was striving so successfully to repress" but elsewhere he reveals little of his feelings. They appear only sporadically, as when he describes his efforts to stay awake for fear of dying in the night.

He coped with his illness by gathering a large group of friends around his bedside (and when recuperating, in his home) who would distract him by "kidding" or "horsing around". Unfortunately, one of these, Speed Vogel, a self-

writer, yet after the publication of *Shaw*, he turned down the offer of a second book from Jonathan Cape, and spent the next forty years in obscurity, financially dependent on his first wife.

He was mad about tennis, oratory, and Trotsky, and the indexes to his books harbour entries from Heraclitus to Trees, message of. But for such a clear-minded writer his life was one of disarray; he was physically clumsy, had no sense of direction, and liked to go running nude around the countryside. During a fire at Rotherhithe he swam across the Thames for a better view, and emerged in a black integument of melted rubber. His amusing habits were not intentionally of his own making, however, since he detested frivolity. Meeting Auberon Waugh, he could not twig a pun about Dr Collis Browne, and to a man who had told him a joke in the pub he replied: "But, were the Englishman, the Irishman and the Jew in the restaurant? They obviously had nothing in common."

It was rather a typical enquiry, for the Collisian intellect was geared to the idea of synthesis, of seeing things together as a whole. In any way, he belonged to an older, pre-specialist age, before the Two Cultures and the compartmentalization of learning that he so resisted. He subscribed quite reasonably and without mysticism to the notion that the natural world is full of wonders to be investigated: "It is not the rabbit out of the hat but the rabbit out of the rabbit that is so extraordinary." His talent lay not in original research but in the orchestration of existing scientific knowledge into a fresh and accessible form.

He is at his best in his short essays, like those in the first part of *Down to Earth* (1947) wherein he describes the natural splendours of potato, ant and worm. His "Contemplations upon Ants" is a brilliant little theatre of lessons with its own creative originality, a myrmecological masterpiece, and *The Moving Water* (1955) is a hydrolatrous work that is surely in need of reissuing. Elsewhere he could write on anything from sun-worship to sewage-disposal, and such polymathic versatility marks him down as either a genius or a hack. One suspects from this memoir that he was something of both.

indicted ne'er-do-well, sponger and snob, has contributed every other chapter to the book. Neither he nor Heller realizes that the art of telling a story is to know what to leave out. The reader is subjected to accounts of almost every item of food eaten by the pair of them over a three-year period and of almost every friend they met. "Along with Green, Speed, and George, and such others as Joe Stein, A. Robert Towbin . . . and Barbara Gold, I include Jeffrey . . .". We learn nothing of interest about any of these people, though we are informed that they all had "a morbid anthropic wit", which is elsewhere described as "breath-taking". One example of this morbid wit must suffice. Vogel reports that when a car stalled, "Heller, a man noted for a certain kind of wit, rose immediately to the occasion. 'Hey, Ngoot, get out and push it.'"

It is hard to find anything to redeem this book. The lives of two ageing schoolboys will be of little interest to most readers, even though one was suffering from a dreadful disease. Perhaps the two most interesting passages are Heller's description of his own divorce proceedings, which were in progress at the time, and his account of the relative costs of divorce and illness. He savages his wife's lawyer, mainly by quotations from his letters and by transcripts from the court action. The lawyer's language and prose style are almost as contemptuous as Heller's own. Do British lawyers openly savour their opponents of being "self-serving legal writers" and imply that they are "cretins"? Or is this all part of American "horsing around"? As to finance, the cost of the first year of Heller's illness was about \$150,000, of which his insurance paid only \$40,000. One wonders what would happen to someone poor and unemployed who contracted the Guillain-Barré syndrome. Heller's legal costs for the divorce settlement were \$300,000. If it is possible to draw a moral, it is that American lawyers are more rapacious than American doctors.



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Military solutions, political ends

Paul Kennedy

CHARLES TOWNSHEND
Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the twentieth century
220pp. Faber. £14.95.
0571 138020
NOEL O'SULLIVAN (Editor)
Terrorism, Ideology and Revolution: The origins of modern political violence
232pp. Brighton: Wheatsheaf. £25.
0745000576

The heart of the modern "counterinsurgency" problem, as Charles Townshend puts it in the preface to his *Britain's Civil Wars*, is "the extent to which violence can be used to counter violent and semi-violent challenges, and to preserve and restore the kind of order on which the informal British constitutional system rests". The ruthless "Roman" method of dealing with dissident tribes and slave revolts has always been there, of course, and in the days of Empire the further one moved from the halls of Westminster to the hedgerows of County Clare or the hill-stations of the Punjab, the more likely was it that the British military would respond to force with even greater force. Destroying a Dervish army with a Gatling gun, or cutting the Wahabites to ribbons with a force of armoured cars, was, in its way, little different from the Roman response of mass crucifixions.

Yet, as Townshend also shows in a survey of British counterinsurgency in the twentieth century which ranges from Britain itself to Palestine, Malaya and Kenya, there were usually profound difficulties in store for a British government which tolerated ruthless reprisals. The first was that domestic public opinion was often found to be much divided over such use of force. Brigadier-General Dyer's incredible action at Amritsar may have been applauded by those right-wing Englishmen who felt they had to "stand firm" in India, but they greatly

disturbed the Government and even his own Army superiors. Unleashing the "Black and Tan" irregulars against the IRA was – in the crudest sense – a way of out-terrorizing the terrorists; but the reports of this "dirty warfare" were counterproductive once British (and American) opinion pondered their implications. In the same way, while British anger at the Irgun Zvai Leumi's trick of booby-trapping the bodies of captured army sergeants in Palestine was perfectly natural, an even stronger response was to ask why British forces were needed to separate Arabs and Jews in the first place.

The second major difficulty is one which Professor Townshend, with his extensive writings upon British policy in Ireland, is especially good at illuminating: it concerns the tension between achieving military solutions, in the narrow sense of victories in the field, and finding political solutions, in the sense of "winning the hearts and minds" of the people so that they would spurn (rather than support) resistance movements. Given that British governments from Gladstone's time onwards maintained that they were in Ireland, Egypt, India and so on, in order to provide that good government without which "progress" was impossible, it was simply not enough to drive insurgents into the hills and the jungles. Army (or, as in Mesopotamia, air-force) action was not really the same as "pacification"; imposing martial law (a tricky expedient at the best of times) was also not enough. It was necessary to provide the populace with a sense of security, with everyday organs of law and order (police-men and magistrates, rather than armoured cars), and with other measures to encourage them to identify with "authority". This was the more important when the insurgents sought shelter within the populace at large, as so many guerrilla movements were to do. Far from the military men being blind to this point, it was one which with few exceptions (for example, the uncomprehending Montgomery) they urged time and time again.



Kikuyu Mau Mau suspects lined up by colonial soldiers before being sent to detention camps. This photograph is taken from Jonathan Grimwood's *Photography of the 20th Century* (192pp. Blandford. £12.95. 07137 18021).

In certain cases, it is true, a counter-insurgency campaign worked very well – for example, against the Malaysian Communists, or the Mau-Mau; but there were unusually good military and geographical circumstances, from the viewpoint of the imperial power. In many other cases, neither military nor political "pacification" campaigns eradicated unrest. In fact, one of the sadder lessons of the twentieth century has been that, while suppression could obviously never win over the "hearts and minds" of the inhabitants, even a package of liberal, moderate, compromise proposals could not always prevent acts of rebellion, terrorist outrages, and flourishing guerrilla movements.

The reasons why liberal solutions to unrest and terrorism have been only partially successful are discussed in Townshend's text, but emerge even more clearly in the collection Noel O'Sullivan has edited called *Terrorism, Ideology and Revolution*. The first is the sheer strength of nationalist and ethnic feeling, with which liberalism's atomistic and at the same time cosmopolitan philosophy could never really get to grips. For nearly half a century, for example, intelligent British politicians and administrators kept inventing ever more elaborate schemes to satisfy Indian nationalist aspirations – the Morley-Minto reforms, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, the Government of India Act – without ever fully seeing that what the Indians wanted, like the Irish before them, was to be "out from under". Yet the Congress Party in its turn was equally blind to the demands for freedom of the Muslims – just as, to take other examples, passionate Zionists, after driving out the British, have found it unthinkable to admit the position of passionate Arab nationalists; while the IRA and its sympathizers find it impossible to understand the emotions of Ulster Protestants.

But such ethnic and tribal hatreds, and local unrest at heavy-handed authority, have always existed. On the other hand, "modern political violence" has its origins – so it is argued by Norman Hampson in the O'Sullivan essay collection – in the French Revolution, because only since then has it possessed an abstract, ideological character which justified the use of force to compel others to subscribe to one's view of society. Ironically, one needed to be in the post-"Rights of Man" era before political violence could be excused by reference to the "popular will", an entity which can only be correctly interpreted and carried through by those activists irrevocably committed to the cause. O'Sullivan does have a point in arguing that modern, terrorist forms of political violence may be more closely related to the liberal-democratic tradition than we generally admit – at least to the extent that both of them appeal to abstract principles: to the will of the people (however construed), to the cause of "progress" (again, however construed), to the concept of "just violence to end oppression", and other similar concepts favoured by Robespierre and Lenin, the National Socialists and the Red Brigades.

As a collection, *Terrorism, Ideology and Revolution* is a very loose bag indeed, despite the best efforts of its editor to hold it together. While it claims to be a concerted attempt to

bring the resources of political theory, political science and history to bear on modern terrorism, its strength lies in the eclectic array of historical case-studies, from the French Revolution, the Nazi Terror (Jeremy Noakes) and terrorism in Ireland (Townshend once again), to surveys of the use of political violence in Islam (David Caplan), Turkey (C. H. Dodd), and Latin America (Richard Gillespie). As such a list makes clear, the contributors feel that modern political violence is the preserve of neither the Right nor the Left, nor incidentally of rebels hiding in the jungle; it can also be employed by ideologists who have seized the reins of power in order to compel obedience from society (in other words, "state terrorism"). In consequence, the various gallant attempts to define terrorism, and to locate it within some well-honed political theory, never seem to fit the sheer variety of examples which this edition contains. As Paul Wilkinson (who contributes a piece on "fighting" terrorism) points out, "context is all in the analysis of political violence"; and since the context changes from the Tupamaros to the Basque separatists, any oversimplified analysis of the causes of terrorism is in turn likely to lead to dangerously simplistic proposals for dealing with it.

If there is a unifying thread, it may not be in the regional and economic conditions which produce terrorist acts, but in the type of individual who becomes a fully committed, obsessed terrorist. Again and again, one catches a glimpse of the same features: an idealistic drive to change things, an ability to ignore moderation or compromise solutions, a ruthlessness in support of the cause, an emotional precariousness, a lack of sympathy for (or curiosity about) others. Even if the general social or nationalist causes which have fanned popular unrest were to fade away, one suspects that this sort of self-driven terrorist would probably still remain, rather like the rump of the Baader-Meinhof Gang in West Germany.

Just how one deals with terrorist acts, or with larger examples of political violence, defies an easy answer. Gandhian theories of non-violence (ably discussed in one of these essays by Bhikhu Parekh) are not practicable; nor is answering violence with yet more violence, and in particular using disproportionate means to combat the unrest which springs from broad social causes, a real solution. Simply because the civilized state is such a delicate construct, it ought to balance ends against means, in the classic liberal fashion, when it ponders its response to political violence. No one can suppose that the obsessions of the individual terrorist, or the deep-rooted ethnic and ideological hatreds of this world, can be assuaged simply by applying rational, utilitarian, compromise-seeking policies; but in most cases it is worth struggling to find a political solution to political violence. If such solutions are rejected by extremists, then the Western state is tied to take firm action, provided it remains committed to acting within the framework of the rule of law. There is cause neither for despair, nor for marching around in heavy boots, because certain individuals are prone to resort to acts of violence to achieve their political ends.

Perilous profession

George Theiner

ROGER BOYES and JOHN MOODY
The Priest Who Had to Die
204pp. Gollancz. £10.95.
0570303806

"Of course I'm aware that for the Truth one has to suffer", Father Jerzy Popieluszko told a Western journalist in what was probably his last interview. A few weeks later his tortured body was fished out of a reservoir at Wloclawek, some eighty miles north-west of Warsaw.

The authors of *The Priest Who Had to Die* give a chillingly graphic account of the police operation:

That October morning in 1984 was overcast. The sky had the texture and colouring of damp brown gabardine. The team on shore huddled into the back of the van, drinking coffee from a vacuum flask. One of them was reading aloud a sports report when a shout came from the bank. They had found something! This time it was not a false alarm. In the early days after the kidnap, hundreds of police and military reservists had scoured the countryside around Torun, like beaters on a shoot. And they had found bodies: decayed tramps wrapped in newspapers, skeletal traces of long unsolved mysteries. But not the man they were looking for.

Flopped on shore, he lay there like the carcass of a porpoise. Mud made a death-mask of his face, smothering his eyes and lips, concealing everything which endows a head with humanity... The tongue was reduced to a pulp. Traced in blood on the mud-died neck was a line where the noose had been attached. The clothes identified him, of course. He wore the garment of his profession.

Jerzy Popieluszko was an obscure Polish cleric, whom both the workers and the Church chose to be the priest of Solidarity in the short heyday of that movement. He became one of the best-loved (by the people) and at the same time most hated (by the authorities, and in particular the secret police) figures in the country. Roger Boyes and John Moody write:

Popieluszko had made the transition in that first year of martial law from being a mild irritant to a

first-order nuisance. The Warsaw militia were complaining. Popieluszko was a crowd-control problem forcing the police to deploy month after month heavy concentrations of riot troops.

As the secret police became more aware of his importance in the eyes of the Polish people, they stepped up their harassment and intimidation. Efforts were made to persuade him to give up his sermons; his car was daubed with white paint, he received threatening letters; a bomb was thrown through the window of his room as he was wrapping Christmas presents in December 1982. On Friday, October 19, 1984, Jerzy Popieluszko was kidnapped as he was being driven by his friend and chauffeur, Waldemar Chrostowski (who managed to escape from the kidnappers and thus became a damning witness against them) to say Mass at Bydgoszcz. The police unit which carried out the abduction and murder – Captain Grzegorz Piotrowski, Lieutenant Leszek Pekala and Lieutenant Waldemar Chmielewski, together with their superior officer, Colonel Adam Pietruszka, Deputy Director of the Church Department of the Secret Police – were later tried and given long terms of imprisonment. The prosecutor and the judge made strenuous efforts to prevent anyone higher in authority from being implicated by the defendants; and the prosecutor, in a shameful performance reminiscent of the East European show trials of the 1950s, managed to make Father Popieluszko look like the main defendant by attacking him, time and again, as an "agent provocateur" and "extremist".

It is hardly surprising, under the circumstances, that the buck stopped with Colonel Pietruszka. He and Captain Piotrowski were sent to prison for twenty-five years, the two Lieutenants for fifteen and fourteen years respectively. (The sentences have just been reduced as part of a general amnesty.) But we may never know who, among Poland's top policemen and politicians, should have sat in the dock with them. Father Popieluszko remains a folk hero (some 400,000 people attended his funeral), and the Vatican is considering him for beatification.

All psyched up

Anthony de Jasay

ELI SAGAN
At the Dawn of Tyranny: The origins of individualism, political oppression, and the State
420pp. Faber. £17.50.
0571 138225

At the Dawn of Tyranny projects psychoanalysis on to sociology. The result oscillates between the tenuous and the fatuous. Its core is an argument by analogy between the psyche and society, with the "drive to separate from the mother", weaning, toilet-training and the anxiety of being "reengulfed in mother" acting as the springs of social history. We learn of intimate relations connecting the control of bowel movements, cruelty, the sacred drum as the symbol of "the great transmutations of animality" and the State. The kinship system stands for Mother. People feel threatened that "mother will eat them" without the king's protection and the more tyrannical and grossly cruel the king, the more he "assuages their anxiety".

The development of the psyche is the paradigm for the development of society: just as all children must pass through puberty to reach adulthood, so all primitive societies must pass through a special transitional stage before attaining civilization. The evidence for this transitional stage, in which States are first formed, is provided by travellers' and missionaries' accounts of three handfuls of people in Buganda, Tahiti and Hawaii. All civilized societies, notably the great archaic civilizations, "must have" passed through substantially the same transitional stage – though we are told that there is no evidence either way about this.

For the general reader with a strong stomach and a vicarious interest in strange practices, the Afro-Polyesian exotica and curiosa compiled by Eli Sagan may be worth reading in their own right, particularly as he writes quite well: de-

spite lapses into sociologese. What spoils it all is his ambition to make these exotica support a universal theory of how and why States get formed and indeed why the fate of mankind is what it is.

The argument is unhistorical to a degree. Caesar and William the Conqueror, *inter alios*, were "annihilators of people", "sadists and megalomaniacs". The king is king "because he can kill at will". Primitive societies "seek to escape" the "prison of kinship"; out of a psychic need they "invent" kinship and the State (in real-time history the winners impose them on the losers); they "invent" an aristocracy (did the Celts of Gaul invent the Franks, the Saxons of England the Normans and the Slavs and Finns of the East European marshes the "Rus"?); they also "invent" ritual homicide "to free themselves from the prisons of kinship and cannibalism". Institutions are "inventions" of people, rather than the unintended products of their interactions. They "trade off" family and lineage for the alternative kind of cohesion offered by the State. The many major societies (for example, in China and India) where there was little or no trade-off for centuries and kinship systems coexisted intact with organized States until industrialization began to shake loose the patterns of settlement, go unmentioned. Nor is there any obvious place in Sagan's scheme for feudal systems with their polycentric distribution of power, weak kinship ties and weak central authority.

Like giving liquor to Indians, feeding certain authors a diet of dialectic or Freud, let alone both, has troubling effects. Anything goes, and any fact as well as its opposite can be made to fit the theory. Both when we are for abortion and when we are against, our attitude is "a product of our own infanticidal impulses". Nationalism is "the grim shadow of kinship society" as well as "its negation". State forms of cohesion are "kinship forms and not kinship forms". Authoritarian fathers "result from and make possible" the overthrow of the kinship system – and so on to quantum leaps and negations of the negation.

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Talk of destruction

John Deathridge

JACOB KATZ
The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's anti-Semitism
 158pp. University Press of New England, distributed by Trevor Brown Associates. £12.75. 087451 3685

Nearly everyone today concedes (often wearily) that Wagner had his "darker side". The title of this English translation of Jacob Katz's *Vorwort des Antisemitismus* looks jaded, though the original dourly reminds us that Katz – a distinguished scholar of Jewish history – is interested in Wagner as a "Harbinger of Anti-Semitism" and not in his genius. The blurb on the dust-jacket of the English edition sounds uncomfortably glib: "While not absolving Wagner from responsibility for his views, Katz contends that contemporary Jews have paradoxically and uncritically adopted the Nazis' assumptions about Wagner. Katz argues that Wagner's music is untainted by his anti-Semitism."

Katz says that the case against Wagner's music is "unprovable", which is not quite the same thing. To the critical historian, he argues, the "evidence" of Wagner's artworks and the hullabaloo that in some, and by no means only Jewish, circles has enveloped them since the Second World War, offer no rewards. The scruples of the conscientious scholar compel him to concentrate only on the "facts" taken from Wagner's writings and other contemporary testimony while leaving the question of whether Wagner's antisemitic views can deepen our understanding of his artworks to the "historians of literature and music". If this looks like evasion of some tricky issues in the name of professional ethics, it is certainly not intended in Wagner's defence. Even discounting Nazi horrors and questions of aesthetics, Katz comes to the remarkable conclusion that "the historical condemnation of Wagner by no

means rests on the belated insight of the historian, but results from the correct understanding of his own statements and actions. Wagner himself sits in judgment on Wagner and is unable to grant himself a historical acquittal."

Coming at the end of a level-headed, if rather prim, account of Wagner's anti-Jewish passions, this is a surprising, not to say contorted, *deus ex machina* that makes the dust-jacket's aside about "responsibility" look puny by comparison. This is a pity, since the book is in many respects a welcome antidote to the sanitized image of Wagner in the popular biographies by Curt von Westernhagen and Martin Gregor-Dellin that has played a minor role in Germany's so-called "coming to terms with the past", and an informed rebuttal of some senseless Wagner-battering which – in the German-speaking media at least – has passed for an adequate answer to a feeble cover-up. At the last minute Katz seems to have sensed that by steering a severely factual course between these two implacably opposed camps he had knocked the stuffing out of his own position. He saves the situation by turning the tables on his "method" with an interpretation of Wagner's well-known dislike of the antisemitic movement of the 1870s and early 1880s that is quickly turned into the "fact" that Wagner shrank "from the practical consequences of his way of thinking". Wagner had his own, and not exactly liberal-minded, reasons for publicly distancing himself from the movement, including the view that it was vulgar and not very "intelligent". But the idea that he could foresee "the potential for disaster embedded in his life-work" is both too kind and too cruel since Katz assumes too readily that Wagner had consistent and serious moral qualms about his antisemitic philosophy, which is difficult to prove, while also implying that he was already imagining the possibility of a whole-scale massacre of the Jews – a leap of faith influenced by the kind of historical hindsight that Katz explicitly rejects.

Although everyone has heard about Wagner and the Jews, few have actually read what he

said about them or bothered to grasp his dialectical, quasi-Hegelian train of thought and its significant changes of emphasis in the later stages of his life. Katz treads warily through the complicated reasoning of *Judaism in Music* (1850) and is careful to distinguish between Wagner's arguments and those of Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx, whose over-paradoxical young Hegelian idiom and stereotype of the Jew as a symbol of market relationships are only a prelude in Wagner's polemic to a jungle of biological metaphor and jingoistic palaver quite alien to his predecessors. Liberal guilt about Wagner's antisemitism is often assuaged by some healthy finger-wagging at Marx in particular; but there is a world of difference between Marx's equation of the social emancipation of the Jews with the emancipation of society from Judaism, and Wagner's more demonic version that vilifies Jews on a personal level and burdens them collectively with the "curse" of Ahasuerus and the prospect of "redemption" through self-willed "destruction" (*Unter-gang*).

Katz rightly warns against reading into Wagner's notion of "destruction" anything more than a drastic expression for the de-Judaization of the Jews. Still, Wagner clearly wanted to hit below the belt with *Judaism* and hit even harder when he republished it in 1869, this time with a preface and an afterword denouncing an alleged Jewish conspiracy against his works supposedly brought about by the appearance of the first edition. The reaction to the original had been strong, as Katz shows; but by 1869 it was virtually forgotten – so much so that critics of the new version had little trouble in parrying Wagner's contention about Jewish revenge for the piece with the almost unanimous declaration that they had never heard of it.

By 1869 Wagner was very famous indeed and *Judaism*, first published in a music periodical with limited circulation, had been transformed into a fully fledged brochure that could be reissued according to demand – two factors ensuring that it got more attention than it deserved. Wagner's victims had proliferated too. To Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer – the central targets of the early version – he added Hanslick and Joachim among others, and also the "truly sympathetic friends" delivered to Wagner by "fate from their tribal kinship [with the Jews]". How Wagner rationalized the well-known fact that by 1869 some of his most active collaborators like Karl Tausig and Heinrich Porges were Jews simply defies logical analysis. Katz battles with the arguments nevertheless and clearly shows how Wagner used his friends' alleged attempts to exorcize their Jewishness to reinforce the impression that his libellous brochure was really a praiseworthy way of guiding all Jews along the thorny road to assimilation, as opposed to a "violent ejection" of them that was plainly impractical.

What happened next has opened a Pandora's box of innuendo and bizarre interpretation in the Wagner literature that Katz obviously finds difficult to close. Nietzsche for one knew that Wagner's phobias about the

Jews got worse in his last years, despite a theoretical readiness to accept them with Gobineau's theory of "race" corrected, as it were, through the doctrine of Christian salvation. Nietzsche's fleeting allusion in *The Wagner Case* to the possibility that Wagner was himself a Jew, or thought he nearly was, has spawned a great deal of speculation that Katz tries to do away with "once and for all" with the simple observation that "Geyer", the name of Wagner's stepfather on which the issue rests, "scarcely ever appears among Jews". Geyer may not seem to us a very Jewish name now; but it did to Nietzsche and his friend Peter Gast who, after hearing a false rumour that the maiden name of Wagner's mother was "Beer", spent a malicious evening referring to Wagner as "Geyerbeer". The obscure way Nietzsche phrased his remark was not "completely arbitrary", as Katz thinks, but – as Roger Hollerake has shown in *Music and Letters* (1970) – a deadly reference to the family crest at the head of the private first edition of Wagner's autobiography *Mein Leben* which only Bayreuth's innermost circle could fully understand. It was a wilful distortion of "facts", yet it started a powerful legend that struck at the heart of Bayreuth hypocrisy about the Jews – a legend unfortunately so insidious that the historian can only delude himself if he thinks that merely by putting the facts right again he can dispose of it for good.

Katz avoids the question of why, in spite of Wagner's polemics against the Jews, it is impossible to prove that his music dramas have antisemitic tendencies. In a recent essay, Dieter Borchmeyer has suggested "that Wagner would have given the lie to the promise of redemption held out by the art-work of the future if he had used his music dramas – which promised to free the Jews from the curse of their race – as an instrument of anti-Jewish propaganda". The defence is shaky, to say the least, since it implicates Wagner's aesthetics in a world-view conditioned by antisemitism while seeming to exonerate them from it at the same time. Once the ideological purpose of Wagner's music dramas is seen to include the saving of the Jews, it is only a small step to the fatal argument that he defined the boundaries of the lost paradise he wanted to conjure up in his works by including in them antisemitic stereotypes in the form of social outcasts like Mime or Kundry. With Borchmeyer, Katz would dismiss this line of reasoning as "speculative". Yet its history is much older and more influential than Katz thinks (it begins tentatively with Paul Lindau's critique of *Parzifal* in 1882). In choosing not to confront the issue Katz dismisses too hastily as inadmissible "evidence" the deeper, more subjective motives at the root of Wagner's antisemitism and the controversy it has caused. This may come as a relief for admirers of Wagner's music; for the dispassionate reader, however, it leaves the unsettling impression that in trying to put out the fire with a detailed and sensible account of this unpalatable subject Katz has simply let it smoulder.

Crossing the Desert in a Pram

And when our ears fill up with sand,
and everything goes quiet

lie down in the hood with me.
Pretend the sand is fur.

They'll find us with a little beeping tube
that finds rare animals. They think I am a bag.

The leader of the expedition
can't believe his luck.

He waves the bag about above his head.
Relax, I hear you say, my dear, relax.

Too close by half

Ann Pasternak Slater

WILLIAM EMPSON
Essays on Shakespeare
 Edited by David B. Pirie
 266pp. Cambridge University Press. £25 (paperback, £7.95). 0521 255775

In *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, William Empson quotes the opening of T. S. Eliot's "A Game of Chess", as an illustration of ambivalent participation in heroic verse.

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupid peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of seven-branched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion; [sic]
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic

perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid – troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours . . .

No one would deny this passage its deliberate difficulty, the almost narcotic charm of its syntax, the labyrinthine sophistication of the pastiche – through which the reader, of necessity, picks his way with care. It is not, however, impossibly difficult. Yet by the time Empson has finished with it, the poetry yields up all the rich pleasures one derives from reading a publisher's contract, a mortgage agreement, or the small print of an endowment policy.

For example: "What is poured", Empson confidently asserts, "may be cases, jewels, glitter, or light." The generous reader will readily assent to jewels, allow glitter, but begin to boggle at cases and light. The natural reading is the obvious reading: jewels are poured from the lady's cases, and their glitter rises to meet the light of the candles reflected in her mirror. But Empson has other red herrings to fry. In the next line, "glass may stand alone for a glass

bottle or may be paired with ivory ('vials of glass'); and *unstoppered* may refer only to glass, or to vials and glass, or to vials of glass and of ivory. . . . Though Empson is plainly carried away, he doesn't carry the reader with him. The immediate sense is that the lady's glass and ivory scent-bottles are all unstoppered.

Unstoppered himself and unstopperable, Empson's headlong gabbiness proceeds: "till lurked, which is for a moment taken as the same grammatical form [as *unstoppered*] attracts it towards *perfumes*". Whoah. Would any reader assume, even for a moment, that the vials and glasses lurked, given that the sentence begins "In vials of ivory"? As often, the vaunted closeness of Empson's reading turns out to mean only that his eyes were closed. But, mesmerized by his ambiguous participles, Empson assimilates them indiscriminately to the further adjective and verbs, *powdered, troubled and confused*, concluding, "it is only with the culminating *drowned* that we are forced either to accept the *perfumes* as subject of a new sentence, or . . .". Another alternative follows. For those of us furnished with the Eliot rather than the Empson Version, all doubts had been resolved considerably sooner, with the full stop after *profusion* that Empson inadvertently emended, drowning the sense in ordure.

In *The Business of Criticism*, Helen Gardner maintains that explication merely articulates the multiple misinterpretations that most readers automatically reject without comment:

It is part of the game of "explication", as it has developed, to begin by expressing complete bafflement, as if the critic had never met a metaphor in his life. Then after every kind of obuseness has been exhibited and all possible interpretations and misinterpretations have been considered, the true explication rises like the sun out of foggy mists.

Yet their very complication, the indigestible gristliness of their presentation, makes one feel guilty about leaving them on the side of the plate. Deep down, we know that these terrible granny-knots, these clustered pipes, these un-

appetizing ganglia, are good for us. More than that, they are slippery and tedious to untie. And yet, these analyses seem only distantly related to the text – a recipe for offal, replacing a rich meal. For instance, this passage from *The Waste Land* has, according to Empson, "no variation of sense throughout these ambiguities, and very little of rhythm". Of the seventeen lines he quotes, only eight are completely regular iambic pentameters. There are bravura effects which have fallen on deaf ears. "In fattening the prolonged candleflames": can Empson really not hear the way in which the stress, at "prolonged", pauses on "pro" before stretching itself to settle on "longed"?

Perhaps this is unfair. Does Empson, renowned for marking his place with a kipper bone, always use such fishy arguments? Take his next example, part of Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality", quoted as follows:

Donne, I suppose, was such another,
Who found no substitute for sense; [sic]
To seize and clutch and penetrate; [sic]
Expert beyond experience.

He knew the anguish of the marrow
The agony of the skeleton;
No torments [sic] possible to flesh
Allayed the fever of the bone.

No need to pause over the inventive *torments* for Eliot's contact; this is an imaginative bonus irrelevant to Empson's argument. Three complex glosses are provided to clarify the ambiguities of the third and fourth line, which Empson sees as referring backwards to the beginning of the stanza, or forward to the next. But once again he has willed terminal complications on his unwilling patient. In Eliot's version the second line ends with a comma, the third with a semi-colon, so breaking the two stanzas into three clearly independent syntactical groups. There is poetic justice in Empson's conclusion – of his own, mispunctuated version – "Of course, you may say the lines are carefully punctuated. . . . Eliot can't have taken much comfort from Empson's medicinal paraphrase, either:

Donne found no substitute for desire and the world of obvious reality known through the senses, as a means of investigation, because the habits of the body, or its apprehension of reality, have always information still reserved from one who is experienced in them, and are more profound than any individual who lives by them is aware.

This hideous paraphrase is an example of John Carey's critic as vandal. It is as if Botticelli's Primavera had been bundled into a bobble hat and a duffel coat.

I have spent so long on *Seven Types* because it could be thought to represent Empson at his best. The posthumous *Essays on Shakespeare* shows him at his worst. Whereas in *Seven Types* he sometimes falsified evidence, however inadvertently, in these *Essays* he presents scant evidence at all, even textual. The book is distended by an interminable tapework of conjecture: "I suspect that the Elizabethans did not take this line of talk as solemnly as they sometimes pretended"; "I suspect that Shakespeare was giving the Government, as well as the popular audience, a great deal of what they wanted"; "The Elizabethans, I suspect, felt a little ashamed of being provincials compared to southern Europe". The constructions may vary; the method does not. "I should think Shakespeare added this detail deliberately"; "I should imagine that Shakespeare both added the detail about no shivering and cut out all evidence that . . ."; "I imagine indeed he felt a certain ironical willingness . . .".

Over Kyd's vanished *Ur-Hamlet* he releases an unembarrassed flow of unverifiable postulates. Hamlet's chivalry "seems clearly not due to Kyd. We feel this because of their styles" (unelaborated); "Kyd, one would expect, gave solid ground for Hamlet's view that . . ."; "Kyd would be likely to introduce the idea that . . ."; "We may be sure that Kyd did not want . . ."; "In Kyd's first Act, *therefore*, the Ghost said . . .". And thus hypothesis dries into fact: "I think this was supplied by Kyd: he would see its usefulness . . . and would want . . . Thus there is no reason why Kyd's Queen should not have . . ."; "Kyd would probably

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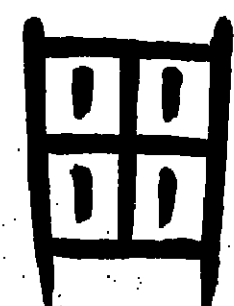
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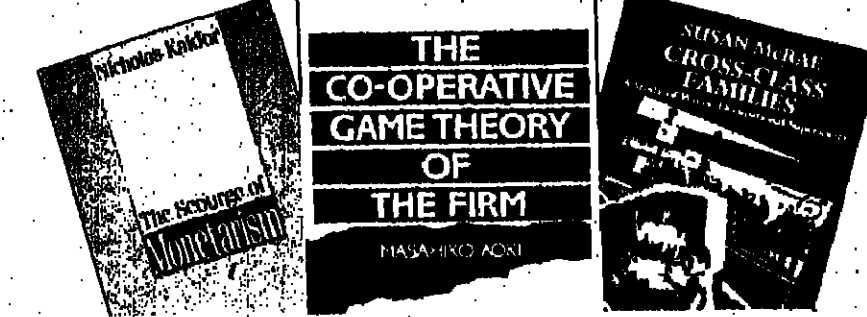
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give him powerful single-line jokes when answering other characters . . . I think that Shakespeare's opening words for Hamlet, "A little more than kin and less than kind", are simply repeated from Kyd . . . Now this technique from Kyd . . .

Empson is still the precocious undergraduate, engagingly self-aware, but unrepentant. "I have no documentation here"; "I am sorry to have lost the reference"; "As I happened never to be challenged on this point, I forgot who my authorities had been"; "You may feel that, inherently, there can be no corroboration to such a fancy"; "The piling up of conjecture may rightly irritate a reader". After such disarming honesty, is it fair to carp? And Empson is so pleased with his ingenuity! "Surely I may put one more storey onto this card castle", he pleads, and, with the satisfaction of a job well done, stands back to admire "my little invention", "my citadel on the high ground of the Absolute Void". Entangling himself in the elastic dimensions of his own concept of the Globe Theatre, or the exact speed at which Puck flew round the earth, he assures us that it's quite simple: "I had to do the sum first, but the geometry is easy once you know the answer". Once the conclusion has been chosen, in other words, any retrospective hypothesis can prove it. "If we can decide on the purpose of the distortions, they become a source of information" cheerfully smuggles the same contraband of false logic.

Academic scholars may bar his way, but Empson wheedles past with charm and a parade of common sense. "I only ask for two years", he reasonably demands, doubling past the agreed dating of *A Lover's Complaint*: "the poem was written in 1598". Insistence on the rules prompts peevish protests against "the modern lunatic revival of pedantry" and the "fell work" of W. K. Wimsatt's intentional fallacy. He swats the "modern wreckers" with their "looney" insistence that theories of Elizabethan stage structure should be based on hard documentary evidence, instead of "insight and intuition and what not". Empson's learning, by contrast, is worn lightly, with winsome self-denigration: "Since writing this in

Peking, I have poked my nose into texts of the chroniclers": "Plunging forever deeper into the heart of the question, I shall now offer my opinion on Saxo and Belleforest, at whom I have peeped . . ."; "If I may chatter about my prejudices at once . . .". And with these words, a "first draft" of *Macbeth* is slipped into an unprecedented dating before *Leir*, two early versions of *Hamlet* are summoned from nowhere ("To believe in this amount of revision does not make much difference"), and a fantastic array of hinged wing-stages, bay-windows, trap-doors, galleries, stairs, store-rooms, joy-walks, "baffles" and heavy furniture are crammed into Empson's hold-all Globe. ("The charm of the building, or at least of thinking about it, is that so much had to be packed into the space.")

Not that Empson has any compunction in deciding the fantasies of his predecessors. Dover Wilson's inventive editing of the Cambridge Shakespeare is an easy butt, and J. M. Robertson, the discredited disintegrator of

the 1930s, is twice sternly dismembered, rather late in the day. Indeed, one of the chief disappointments of this volume is that so much of it is old hat. Long essays ruminate on the relative vice and nobility of Falstaff and Hal, Hamlet's delay and the validity of the revenge code. The argument is hard to follow, self-indulgent in length, and banal in its acceptable conclusions. It is small consolation to learn that all but one of the essays have appeared before, the bulk of the book deriving from articles published in the 1950s.

The preparation of such a volume cannot have been easy. "To edit Empson would be an impertinence", D. B. Pirie fences uneasily in his preface. "I have corrected a few inaccuracies in the quotations from Shakespeare . . .". Numerous others have inexplicably been allowed to stand. Granted, it might have been difficult to judge between misquotation and legitimate paraphrase. Perhaps there is, intrinsically, little to choose between Empson's fairy: "I am going everywhere, faster than the

moon's sphere" and Shakespeare's: "I do wander everywhere, / Swifter than the moon's sphere". Only the modern lunatic revival of pedantry would object, or stubbornly prefer Shakespeare's "Let not light see my black and deep desires" to Empson's "let now light see my black and deep desires". (Curious that Empson should have laid stress on that particular negative in a previous essay.) Yet the editor is surely a little careless to allow Boul's "I'll search the market" (for "go")? And it was hardly kind to preserve the three errors in *Der Berstrafe Brundermorde*, which Empson (or Pirie) gets right a few pages later.

The extreme respect Pirie extends to his author is a reflection of Empson's general reputation. Why is his status so high? Clearly, his prime achievement was to force critics to read more carefully, even if only in rebellious response to the obfuscations and inaccuracies of his own interpretations. His work also intimidates by its veneer of rigour. Seven types of ambiguity – no less – are certainly daunting. His display of idiosyncratic peripheral information is impressive and entertaining, until one begins to doubt his authority. But, while the magic lasts, such sober attractions must appeal, particularly in their unusual combination with Empson's street-wise colloquialism, his penchant for comically damning polemic, and his gift for bringing literature to life. Even in this posthumous volume many of these charms are still apparent. A suggestive parallel is drawn between Dr Johnson and Falstaff, in Kott's gross version of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is parried by reference to Madeline Bassett, the Wodehouse girl who "has a habit of saying that a dear little baby is born every time a wee fairy blows its nose . . .". However remotely, her lances are clearly derived from Shakespeare's *Dream* . . . A characteristically down-market way of making a valid, if uncontroversial point – that the fairies in the *Dream* must be taken seriously. And so one is left, after the attractive Empsonian chutzpah, after the battering torrent of hypothesis and fantasy, with a few tame insights – tiddlers to throw back into the stream of cautiousness.



Fernand Léger's drawing "Femme à la rose" will be offered for sale by Sotheby's among other Impressionist and Modern Drawings and Watercolours, on Wednesday, December 3.

The learning of strangeness

Ian Hamilton

WILLIAM EMPSON
The Royal Beasts and Other Works
Edited by John Haffenden
144pp. Chatto and Windus. £11.95.
0701130849

In the mid-1920s, the young William Empson's struggle to get science into poetry could readily be thought of as heroic. It mattered not (or not much) that the outcome of his struggle was deeply obscure. Being unable to fathom Empson's verse was rather like not knowing about science: he was given the benefit not of doubt but of ignorance. F. R. Leavis compared Empson to John Donne, and Empson's literary contemporaries, flattered that a maths scholar should have turned his gifts to verse, were "amused and enchanted" by the way in which this new poetry "seemed to defy the understanding" and afford "a kind of parlour game, willing away lively hours of puzzlement at many a dinner party."

Empson was an undergraduate star – everyone now knows that *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, published when he was twenty-four, was based on student essays – and it is tempting to excuse the cramped and clotted "brilliance" of his early work as youthful affection. If this had been all it was, though, he would surely have outgrown it. He didn't; except in a handful of stanzas, single lines, and in one marvellous short, repudiating poem, "Let It Go". We now read Empson's most knotty poetry (if we do) – not because of what it is but because of what he wanted it to be, because the conflicts and contradictions which he says it dramatizes are still central to our lives, and because – through his prose – we have come to place a value on the balance of his mind.

The problem from the start perhaps was that Empson never really believed in the collaboration between scientific and poetic truth which

he was so often praised for fostering. Although he did believe that poetry could, and should, challenge the authority of science in some way, he also feared that "to mix the two" would "only confuse both". His poetry too often proves this fear to be well grounded. On the other hand, it would have been impossible for him to write a sort of verse that exercised only half of his intelligence, only half of what he knew. The poems and bits of poems that make sense arrived late in the day; their clarity has a special force because we suspect that they are not the kind of thing their author would have wished to write: "It is the pain, it is the pain endures"; "Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills"; "The contradictions cover such a range". There is an honourable ring to the belated perplexity of Empson's best lines: honourable because we know that he could have argued himself into any number of more comfortable corners.

Although *The Royal Beasts and Other Works*, a splendidly edited collection of Empson's fugitive early writings, does unearth a few more lines that we can add to our "selected clarities", there is little here that is not in some measure disguised by an excess of donnish "wit": there is a laboured but gleeful jesting, an appetite for puns that never quite knows when to stop, and a range of reference that is uncontrolled by any certain sense of where the poem's heart is. And, needless to say, there is much to "defy the understanding". The works include five poems which Empson published as an undergraduate but chose not to collect, as well as a handful of pieces which have not before been any kind of print. Also rescued from oblivion is a stiff and wordy one-act play called *Three Stories*, which Empson saw performed in Cambridge in 1927. *Granta* praised the young playwright for his "almost complete mastery of his Oedipus complex", which gives us a nice taste of what the critics were looking for in those days. For the sake of the record, it is good to have

such juvenilia in print, but the chief value of John Haffenden's labours will be to establish continuities between the infant prodigy and the mature man of ideas. For example, we learn here that from the outset Empson was a connoisseur of opposites and that for him this was a moral as well as an intellectual passion. Decency tends to occupy the middle ground, "between two fools"; the more you know about "alien modes of feeling" the more likely you are to deal imaginatively with the modes of feeling you have been taught to think of as habitual. The most important lesson the young Empson learned from science was, simply, that the world is "strange".

"Alien modes of feeling" are indeed at the centre of Empson's curiosity during the years covered by this volume: from the mid-1920s through to the beginning of the European War. Sent down from Cambridge for a minor sexual misdemeanour (there is a mock-protest poem on the subject printed here, called "A Warning to Undergraduates"), and thus denied an academic career in any English seat of learning, Empson decided to turn East. For most of the 1930s, he taught English in Japan, and then in China – at the Peking National University; although, by the time he got there, Peking University was not actually stationed in Peking but had been exiled to the province of Hunan.

Empson was much impressed by his Chinese colleagues' calm in the face of terrible upheavals, but not so impressed as they were by his prodigious erudition. The university-in-exile was seriously short of books and the story reported by Haffenden is that Empson brought cheer to the staff-room by typing out the whole of Shakespeare's *Othello* from memory. "On another occasion, persuaded by his students, he recited long passages of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. His typewriter provided us, totally out of 'nothing', with Swift's *A Modest Proposal*."

But Empson was not in the Far East to cut a Cambridge style of dash. Not knowing any Chinese, he took up Buddha-baiting as a hob-

by. This soon turned into an obsession; "The Buddhas are the only accessible art I care about", he said, and set about filling many a notebook, it seems, with jottings on the subject of the variously enigmatic "Buddha face" – a face which, by seeming to contain opposites, he thought might teach squabbling Westerners some moral lessons, some sense that "Life involves maintaining oneself between contradictions that can't be solved by analysis". The author of *Milton's God* was already looking towards a religion which enabled him to feel "morally free to recognise that the world contains wonderful things as well as horrible things" and which generously granted a form of Resurrection to us all.

During these Far East years, Empson wrote *Some Versions of Pastoral* and also certain of the material that later went into *The Structure of Complex Words*, but we learn from a collection that he was also working on a novel called *The Royal Beasts*, a kind of Empsonian *Man Beneath the Fur*, in which a British colonial administrator is faced with the problem of what to do about a tribe of mutants who, although possessed of woolly pelts and swivelling tails, are none the less rather impressively human in their powers of speech and brain. The mutants are tough to deal with because they are not keen to be classified as human: observation has taught them that, as animals, they would get a better deal. It is a jolly enough notion; and it permits Empson to contrive some ingenious argutiny from both points of view, but one can see why he found it hard to spin the whole thing out to any publishable length.

It is also understandable that he did not press upon the stage a ballet he later planned (in 1942) called "The Elephant and the Bird" – as East-meets-West extravaganza deriving from the author's Buddha-hunts. At the very least, it would have been tricky to cast the ballet's central part: Empson required an elephant-dancer who would not "galumph".

The critic's continental shift

The TLS is sent many hundreds of works of academic criticism for review each year. We asked Chris Baldick to assess one week's batch.

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'If I Were Done': "Macbeth" and tragic action
156pp. University of Massachusetts Press.
£16.65.
0870235346
- SACVAN BERCOVITCH and MYRA JEHLEN
(Editors)
Ideology and Classic American Literature
451pp. Cambridge University Press. £35.
0521252210

If recent potter histories of modern critical theory were taken too literally as narratives, it would seem that criticism, like some legendary voyager, embarks for various adventures on the isles of historicism, formalism, myth, psychoanalysis and structuralism; then, speeding westward and circumnavigating the rocks and whirlpools of phallo and logocentrism, drops off the edge of the world into the deconstructive abyss with all hands. Presented as a diachronic development, the course of criticism becomes a pioneering myth, perhaps not accidentally echoing an earlier kind of pilgrim's progress from the puritanism of Cambridge, England, to the promised land of Yale at New Haven. Take it synchronically, though, and the refugee fable of supersession no longer applies. As criticism settles new territory, its discarded former host does not conveniently incarnate itself like a grieving Dido; rather, the different criticisms appear to be arrayed stop and atwart another like sedimented deposits, often faulted or scarped. Sampling a week's output of academic criticism, then, is less a plotting of points on an itinerary than a matter of taking what geologists (but not they alone) call a bore.

At the remote fossil-rich depths one can find the strangest creatures, witnesses of an era before literary critics first crawled on to the land mass of the academy; dark days when amateur bibliophiles stalked the libraries in predatory packs, hoarding, pillaging, vandalizing and forging as they went. From this primeval chaos emerges Charles Hamilton's *In Search of Shakespeare*, a work of palaeographic and biographical speculation in the "detective" mode. Hamilton, the author of *Scribblers and Scoundrels* and other works, is a septuagenarian handwriting consultant who spends much of his time either exposing forgeries (the "Hitler Diaries" being a recent one) or being persecuted by reincarnation cranks claiming to be Francis Bacon. As a boy, he seems to have developed some unwholesome habits when a copy of the Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* came into his hands with a facsimile signature on its frontispiece: "Sometimes I would make believe the signature was real, although I knew it was not, and I would brush it lightly and affectionately with my fingers, pretending that I was touching the same paper that the Great Poet had touched." Later, on his first visit to Stratford, he bribed the sexton at Holy Trinity to let him stand on Shakespeare's grave. "I bowed my head and moved my lips in silent

discovery: "Dear friend Will, please help me to discover some scrap of handwriting from your pen."

Hamilton is plainly afflicted with a severe case of what deconstructionists now call the metaphysics of presence, although others would be tempted to call it fetishism. Such obsessive desires always find some way to fulfilment; and, sure enough, our bardolater has persuaded himself that he has discovered not one, but nine documents in the Great Poet's own hand. Hamilton knows all that a good palaeographer should know about Small Bastard Secretary and other varieties of Renaissance handwriting, but he uses this expertise as an excuse to override some basic requirements of scientific method, substituting for it an impressionistic "feel". More cautious scholars will recognize as Shakespeare's only five or six signatures and perhaps a short section in one copy of *The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore*, but not his last will and testament. Hamilton's chain of conjectures hangs on the assertion that Shakespeare's will is indeed holographic and not the work of the poet's lawyer Francis Collins or his clerk; from this "breakthrough" we are hurried along to the further discoveries that Shakespeare worked as a literary factotum for Francis Bacon, and that he was murdered by his daughter Judith. Although Hamilton does offer some evidence to unsettle the case for Collins's hand, what we are asked to believe instead is just too improbable. It is safer to assume that the will was written out by some anonymous amanuensis (perhaps the original small bastard secretary), and that Shakespeare, divinely forewarned of all the nonsense that would eventually be written about him, took his own life.

A more recent kind of fossil is the hobbyist survey of the "Budgegirs in World Literature" variety; the kind which most often makes academic criticism a laughing-stock. This genre reached its absurd limit a few years ago with the publication of a book about cucumbers, pumpkins and gourds in literature, and it appears now to be retiring to safer ground. Laurence Goldstein has already co-edited one book on automobiles in American culture, and is doubtless now at work on a study of literary canoes or bicycles; but his *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* is in fact a less eccentric production than it might sound. Defining as its subject the transformation of aviation (including space-flight) into myth, it takes off smoothly with a stimulating chapter on Leonardo da Vinci, in which the disturbing themes of the "sacred history of flight" are announced: cruelty, narcissism and envy are the motives dominating western sky-writing from Leonardo through Yeats's "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death" to Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon*. In this pathology of aerial heroism, Goldstein has found a line of argument which can overcome the tendency of this kind of book to turn into a mere catalogue. But although he does unearth some choice curiosities like Verticalism ("Poetry is Vertical", its manifesto announced in 1932), his survey has its disappointments, chiefly its failure to address directly the extraordinary confluence of aviation-mania and Fascism in the 1930s. Apart from a few remarks on Lindbergh's master-race fantasies and a mention of Mussolini Aviator (the propaganda biography which asserted that "Every airman is a born Fascist"), this complex and crucial phase of the modern aviation myth is flittered away; Auden's *The Orators*, for instance, is mentioned only in passing.

A larger disappointment, for which Goldstein himself is not directly to blame, is the generally second-rate quality of modern writing on flying machines: only in the novel of aerial bombardment (*Gravity's Rainbow*, *Slaughterhouse Five*) is there real achievement to celebrate, while of the thousands of odes to Lindbergh that appeared in 1927, none deserves reprinting. The problem here is what could be called the epic fallacy, that great enterprises beget great poems. This misconception – a bane of American literature since Emerson and Whitman at least – was to be exposed cruelly, as Goldstein shows, by the bored and even contemptuous response of

poets to the Apollo moon landing in 1969. Goldstein's survey is more intelligent than others in its genre, but like these others, it is compromised by the false promise it offers: that the same qualities which excite us about cucumbers, budgegirs or biplanes can actually be found reflected back to us, enhanced and glorified in works of literature.

As we climb up to those strata at which academic specialization makes its appearance, we come across John R. Nabholz's *"My Reader My Fellow-Labourer"*. Nabholz would be the right word for any reader of this book, an almost perfect example of dead-end specialism; Nabholz's field being that of the rhetorical devices employed in such entirely unimportant Romantic prose works as Wordsworth's *The Convention of Cintra* and Lamb's "Oxford in the Vacation". To some extent his book reflects a recent surge of interest in reception theory, or the responses of readers to texts. Some have had high hopes that reader-response criticism would constitute a great revolution in our understanding of literature, but the signs are that it has merely changed the etiquette of critical discourse. So the critic who would once have written "this line is rich in assonance" will now write "the reader responds to the rich assonance of this line". Nabholz's procedure, in examining the pronouns "we" and "you" in Lamb's essays, for example, is often of this kind, and his most convincing argument – that Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is rhetorical and apologetic rather than systematically theoretical – is unremarkable. His concept of the reader does not allow for specific or dissenting readers, and always assumes that "the reader" is male. Nobody will wish to contest Nabholz's conclusions on *The Convention of Cintra*, for the simple reason that nobody else has read it; but the appearance of competition in the criticism of Lamb's essays (from one Gerald Monsman) seems to have provoked a territorial dispute: Nabholz takes care to point out in a footnote that "Some of Monsman's remarks on 'Oxford in the Vacation' were anticipated by my essay 'Drama and Rhetoric in Lamb's Essays of the Imagination'". If Lambville isn't big enough for the both of them, there will be trouble at high noon, I fear.

With James T. Jones's *Wayward Skeptic*, we have arrived at a faultline exposing that layer of rock upon which a hundred Departments of English were founded: the New Criticism which dominated the American academy from

the 1930s to the 1950s. Jones has set out to rescue from this now fallen orthodoxy the figure of R. P. Blackmur, casting him improbably as "the predecessor of the revolution in criticism in the seventies". While Blackmur is recognized as an outstanding "practical" critic of particular works, a thorough scrutineer of diction and tone, Jones claims that he was a theorist rather than an inspired pragmatist. The basis of this attempted rehabilitation is the argument that even the most apparently un-theoretical criticism always presupposes some theoretical principles. This is certainly true, but it does not follow that these principles will be the practical critic's own. In Blackmur's case it is quite clear that his doctrine of the objectivity of language and convention is little more than a reformulation of principles expounded by T. S. Eliot. Although he refused to follow Eliot into the arms of the Church, Blackmur was an epigone, in his distaste for Romantic and Protestant writing, in his sacramental cult of artistic form, and even in the bizarre (but rarely challenged) conviction that nature and human experience are a chaotic "formless flux".

Wallace Stevens once remarked that "after you have finished twenty-five pages of Blackmur, you haven't the faintest idea what he has been talking about". And after the 200 pages of Jones's book, one is not much the wiser; he has done little to help us overcome the notorious problem of Blackmur's prose style – a convoluted pseudo-Jamesian dance of abstractions with which Jones has probably become too familiar to remember how exasperating it is for the newcomer. The clarification which would have come from a careful introduction or from an initial exposition of specific critical cases, is noticeable by its absence.

Before examining our last four books, in which truly contemporary critical approaches are at work, it is worth returning to one of Eliot's and Blackmur's dogmas in order to highlight an important gulf between the New Critics and the much newer criticisms. The assertion, so often repeated by Blackmur and his co-thinkers, that the artist subdues the formlessness of nature or of human experience into an ordered formal whole, may appear reasonable to the aesthete who can make no sense of the world outside the work of art, but to a geologist, say, or even to a connoisseur of cucumbers, the assumption that nature is formless is just risible. Nor does experience come to

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the artist raw and chaotic; rather, it is "always already" formed in advance, through the structures of language and through ideological codes ranging from those of gender to those of nationality. The bewilderment suffered by readers trained in New Criticism when faced with more recent critical approaches often arises from the contemporary schools' unwillingness to assent to the jargon – for that is what it is – of organic unity or of the transcendent "shaping spirit" of the artist. The newer critics seek instead to explain literary form in more accessible terms of linguistic and cultural codes.

A good example of this trend and its benefits is available in Stirling Haig's *Flaubert and the Gift of Speech*. This very clear and helpful study of dialogue in three of Flaubert's novels begins (despite its title) by substituting the term "discourse" for "speech", thus emphasizing the fact that Flaubert aimed not to mimic the spoken word but to contrive a specifically literary solution to the problem of his characters' banal conversation. Haig shows in detail how Flaubert, exploiting the equivocal objective/subjective status of the imperfect tense, manipulates free indirect discourse (*le style indirect libre*) to "redeem" Emma Bovary from the clichés of direct discourse. The mystery of her character is produced in the care which her creator takes to reduce her direct locutions to a minimum, providing her submerged lyricism through his free-indirect voice: Emma Bovary, *c'est lui*, in this precise sense. In *L'Education sentimentale* too, as Haig explains, the "surface banality" of direct discourse "gestures to a vibrant subtext", while in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, on the other hand, it rings hollow as pure cliché.

Some readers may find this study rather dry and technical, but to the serious student of Flaubert it offers a very valuable focus on a decisive innovation in the novelist's craft. Haig's attention to the Flaubertian fascination with language as repetition – in short, to Flaubert's parroting – responds in part to a similar preoccupation in contemporary deconstructionist thinking; but his is not the common subservience to deconstruction that tries to convert every writer of the past into a prophet of Derrida: "Flaubert is far from being a post-modernist", he rightly insists. At first sight, Rhiannon Goldthorpe's *Sartre: Literature and Theory* appears to be attempting this kind of retrospective recruitment to the deconstructive cause, for it too is much concerned with the contamination of texts by "the already-written". Yet it transpires that this critic is, on the contrary, determined to rebut the view of Derrida and his followers, who have maligned Sartre as a naïve prisoner of the "logocentric" tradition in Western philosophy – a simple humanist who clung to the unitary human subject as the last prop of that tradition. Goldthorpe's discussion of certain apparently deconstructive motifs in Sartre's writings – the dialectic of presence and absence, for example – is conducted in order to show, in his own terms rather than those of the Derrideans, how much richer Sartre's work is than recent ill-informed reproaches allow.

Such a project spells trouble for those readers who have not the stamina to unravel all the fine distinctions in Sartre's theory of consciousness. Many are likely to get themselves bogged down (in Sartrean phrase, *englués*) in the intricacies of Goldthorpe's opening chapter on *La Nausea*, as they will later if they manage to reach the dense final chapter on poetry and the committed writer. It is well worth persevering, though, if only for the sake of the central chapters on the plays. These include a remarkable, dazzling exploration of *Les Mains sales* and an intriguing defence of *Huis clos* as a parody of bourgeois identity. Goldthorpe's sure command of the extensive Sartrean canon allows her to reveal unexpected shifts and tensions within and between the literary and philosophical works, and her critical intelligence is often formidable.

Complex as Goldthorpe shows the relations to be between Sartrean and Derridean anti-philosophies, we can still find those thinkers being used as symbolic: polar opposites in James L. Calderwood's *If It Were Done*. "Hamlet", he writes, "is a poststructuralist with an undecidable text", whereas "Macbeth on the other hand is something of an existentialist". There was a time when criticism would attempt humbly to reproduce the meaning of

the text; now it is the text which mimics the various schools of criticism. Calderwood's sportive, free-wheeling book on *Macbeth* brings into play a variety of approaches, beginning with a structuralist sequence of binary oppositions (*Hamlet* is to *Macbeth* as language is to action, as remembrance is to prophecy, as sleep is to wakefulness, and so on), moving on to a Freudian reading of Macbeth's deed of darkness as an Oedipal rape, and ending with a strange concoction of myth criticism and deconstruction in which the rituals of violence are seen both to make and to unmake Scottish society. At times he pushes too hard for the non-insights of metadrama ("the actor who plays Macbeth . . . is as compelled to act in his realm as Macbeth is in his"), but on the whole, Calderwood's is a lively and refreshing work by a nimble conjurer of critical surprises.

The one approach to which Calderwood's theoretical promiscuity will not extend, and towards which, indeed, he shows some nervous resentment, is what he calls the New Historicism. This last-named phenomenon is well

worth watching: as the euphoria of deconstruction in America subsides into routine wordplay and spurious gestures of textual "subversion", it is likely to be eclipsed by the less spectacular but more politically responsible work of these historical critics, who have learned how to adapt the terms of European Marxism – especially Althusser's theory of ideology – to the special problems of American culture. In the area of nineteenth-century American writing (where, for instance, the still murderously potent force of Manifest Destiny cannot so easily be whisked away in a sliding of signifiers), the seriousness and sophistication of this school have developed apace, inspired by the work of Richard Slotkin and Sacvan Bercovitch in the 1970s. Myra Jehlen has, with Bercovitch, gathered in *Ideology and Classic American Literature* a very impressive and challenging collection of essays which has to be required reading for Americanists. A particularly heartening feature of the volume is the appearance of contributions from Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx, who pioneered this territory (so

to speak) in *Virgin Land* (1950) and *The Machine in the Garden* (1964); their reassessments and honourable self-criticisms highlight a noticeable sharpening of awareness since the Cold War period. Americanists of the 1980s and 1990s were content to take at face value the asocial and even escapist appearance of their classic texts; but the new Americanists of their post-Vietnam era bring with them a subtler appreciation of those paradoxes in the American ideology by which it transforms dissent into conformity and thrives on the politics of the apolitical. In their hands, the meaning of texts like *The Scarlet Letter*, here interpreted by Jonathan Arac in the light of 1850s politics, or "Benito Cereno", in James Kavanagh's strenuous reading, is changing out of recognition, and the tradition of radical criticism in the United States is being renewed with a clearer comprehension of the demands and pitfalls of cultural analysis. If there is a slow continental shift in today's academic criticism which could realign the course of critical debate, its force may be sought in the strengths of this volume.

Tennyson himself said that the peculiarity of *Maud* was that "different phases of passion in one person take the place of different characters". The speaker in *Maud* is not the Poet but an imagined madman deranged by debility and injustice.

Susan Shatto has prepared a definitive edition of the poem, printing variants both from the manuscripts and from the printed editions so that we may have, as on page 106, eighteen lines of verse, followed by sixty lines of variant readings, often only with minor differences recorded. There are people who need this information, though many of them will feel compelled to consult the sources of it, for that is in the nature of such work, which produces a different kind of nausea from "insights". The preface and footnotes are solid but not lively, strong on biography and the sources of social and historical references, less strong on poetry. The general reader and student will still be happier with Christopher Rick's splendid Longman's Annotated Tennyson, which prints the most startling variants, ravings and spilt, later tacitly expunged, and has a much surer ear for echoes.

In 1971 Alan Sinfield published a good book on Tennyson's language which he says began with the theoretical belief that poetic language is "more densely structured than ordinary language; simply to follow the sequence of the argument is not to exhaust the meaning of the lines". It is hard to see how anybody of any competence ever could have thought that any other reader of competence could "simply follow the sequence of the argument" of *In Memoriam*. Sinfield has now undergone a kind of conversion; he sees that "ways of reading are constructed through the practices of literary criticism". Again it is hard to see how anyone could ever have thought they were not: he is the kind of critic who sets up a sham opponent and then destroys his/her arguments with an onslaught of contempt. His new book *Alfred Tennyson* contains some excellent "insights". Tennyson is very sharp, justifiably, with the vagueness of Tennyson's calls for Freedom in "I loving Freedom for herself" and he gives sufficient political and social history to convince any student that the word is not easy. But in the end his proselytizing tone produces a nausea of quite another kind. It is the nausea produced by intellectual bullying. Sinfield claims to know that his own method is as much a product of history, ideology, class and culture as those he is castigating. But certain words are wholly outside his own wish to deconstruct or reread. "Radical" for instance; "marginal"; "essentialist humanism".

He locates complacencies in others and ignores their intelligence. This matters more in the case of Tennyson himself than in the case of earlier critics. The book is not about Tennyson, but about Sinfield, and produces in the reader, not a sense of a new freedom, but a sense of continuous bumping up against uncriticized needs of the writer's own, to conform to a current orthodoxy or orthodoxies, to placate hostile students, to justify the practice of academic literary study when he holds the

The academic critic and the living writer

Anthony Burgess

The noticing, reviewing and criticizing of works of literature to some extent merge into each other, and one is aware of a cline in the critical and pseudo-critical profession or pseudo-profession. At the bottom lies the bare notification of the act of publishing – "Albert Throgmorton's new novel will please his fans" – and at the summit we expect to find the leisurely, scholarly (though not necessarily elegant) consideration of Throgmorton's new work, relating it to his previous work or the work he may yet produce, to the entire genre in which he practises, to the school, real or imagined, of which he may be considered to be a member, to the moral and aesthetic climate of his day and previous days, tentatively or dogmatically placing him in the whole corpus of literature of which he is a corpuscle, judging him in terms of an aesthetic or a moral system, in short taking him seriously. This kind of criticism, which may call itself a review, is sometimes termed academic. It may not necessarily be produced by academics, but it presupposes conditions associated with academia – leisure, a library, regular discourse with well-stocked and cultivated minds. It is not journalistic reviewing in the sense that most people, inevitably pejoratively, take that activity to be. The journalistic reviewer has little time, little space and often little learning. His tasks are imposed, he is expected to entertain as well as fulfil the first obligation of the reviewer – to notify that a book exists and to make a rough judgment on it (a judgment he may, even in a short time, regret).

It is possible for the rapid scribbler of a brief notice to disclose a clarity of insight denied to the academic critic ("Mr Elliot's *The Waste Land* extrapolates a personal sexual crisis on to a decaying civilization observed during an exceptionally dry summer"), but we expect critical insight to be one of the rewards of long hounding and wide reading. Academic criticism does not smell of the need to earn a quick fee; in this sense it is civilized, and civilized also in that it does not obtrude unseemly spite or bad temper, or the willful ignorance that goes along with them, on to what should be an objective assessment of a creative writer's work. There should also be a dignified humility appropriate to the practitioner of a comparatively lowly vocation. An academic critic may not like Milton, but he knows that Milton is better than he is. When F. R. Leavis inveighed not merely against C. P. Snow's doctrine of the Two Cultures but against C. P. Snow's own novels, he was not behaving as we think an academic should. There was altogether too much spite and dogmatism in Leavis, as well as palpable ignorance and obscurantism, and yet he is taken to be the very model of the academic critic.

The academic critic can let us down as spectacularly as any fee-grabbing Sunday reviewer. Leavis refused to believe that the art of fiction existed after D. H. Lawrence. William Empson was fond of asserting that "there is no good writing to be found anywhere now" and said that "Byron . . . only at the end of his life escaped from the infantile incest fixation upon his sister which was till then all that he had got to say", though Byron did not meet his half-sister till he was twenty-four. T. S. Eliot foisted on to a whole generation of literature students the fallacy that the Elizabethans got their five-act division from Seneca. Eliot, indeed, perpetrated a number of ill-considered judgments – about certain people not being men enough to be damned (highly Kiplingesque), about Marlow as primarily a caricature, about the dissolution of sensibility as a historical event, and so on. He can be excused because he was practicing literary journalism in a not entirely academic way: he had the *Criterion* to bring out. His critical misjudgments can usually be excused also because he was a poet, as perhaps Empson's can. Poetry is characterized by its daring shots in the dark, and the daring is permitted to qualify the sobriety of the critic.

There is a deliberate "false note" in my first paragraph. I have suggested that academic criticism might be prepared to write at length about Albert Throgmorton, but they are rarely willing to accord a living writer the full critical treatment, though they may, as in the *TLS*, stoop to the occasional brief review. They have

a professional stake in the writers of the past, since literary history does not encompass the present, but they are perhaps right, though probably for the wrong reasons, to be cautious in their approach to the contemporary. It is difficult to assess a living writer. The Sunday reviewer takes a short view of the author he has under consideration, relating him to the taste of a segment of his own age; the true critic has to justify his assessment in terms not only of the past but of the future too. Certain authors have appeared in our time in whom serious critics have scented the quality of permanence – William Golding, for instance, perhaps less because of his aesthetic content than his ludic treatment of original sin, which is a venerable doctrine safe to endorse. No academic critic ever had to live to regret his espousal of Hugh Walpole (despite Henry James's enthusiasm in the *TLS* in 1916) or, in our own age, the verse plays of Christopher Fry. While we deplore Leavis's blindness about the post-Laurentian novel, we have to admire with a certain reluctance the closing of the eyes of less eminent academic critics to it. They are protecting their nests, but they are also exhibiting the prudence not permitted to the mere reviewer.

I speak mainly of academic criticism in England and that associated with the older universities of the United States. Caution is appropriate to an establishment covered with ivy and perhaps crumbling. But the newer universities of America, and the critics they produce, are in a different situation. The English departments of the state universities are in a highly competitive market, and their students have a right to assert the ethos of consumerism. They do not wish to read Milton or Samuel Johnson, they speak of relevance and the virtue of understanding their own age through its writers. This puts heads of departments in the awkward position of seeming to attach permanent literary merit to works which quickly prove ephemeral – Brautigan's *Trou Fishing in America* or Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. But the modernization of the English syllabus encourages the younger professors to deploy all the machinery of the academic approach in critical studies of contemporary authors, and to permit post-graduate students to write theses on Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger and even Truman Capote. I recognize that this *aggiornamento* is, owing to American influence, happening in Europe too, but I am old-fashioned enough to find it very un-European. It has been spoken of as cocacolonization.

As a living writer, though old as well as old-fashioned, I have to welcome PhD theses and even published books about my work, most of which inevitably emanate from the United States, though Kantian critiques sometimes thud in from West Germany and Crocean dissertations from Turin or Bari. There is a certain mean satisfaction in recognizing oneself as recognized, but much more important is the writer's need to be understood and thus understand himself. The writer is written, as the post-structuralists tell us, and his work is the product of forces over which he has little conscious control (though far more than Derrida thinks). The academic thesist may find more in his work than may be there, but no writer is likely to reject the imputation of depth where he had thought himself to be shallow, nor the crediting of him with an erudition he does not possess. If he enjoys the flattery, that is because he needs the unction after his summary, and often hostile, treatment by reviewers.

No novelist likes to spend years on the construction of a fictionalized life of Napoleon in the shape of a Beethoven symphony only to have this work dismissed in the Sunday press as a "resounding tinkle". He likes even less disclosure of evidence that the journalistic reviewer has not read his work or has read it cursorily. A novel I wrote on the theme of free will and the nature of evil was dealt with in the *TLS* very summarily and denounced as "a nasty little shocker". The academic thesist is a slave to deep wounds. Authors, especially novelists, are easily hurt and brood excessively about being misunderstood: the immaturity of response to bad reviews has to be deplored, but a certain emotional infidelity seems to be one of the conditions for creating art.

No writer objects to the review which tells him what his work really means; though this

runs counter to his own conscious intention, or rebukes him for remediable faults (though few faults in writing are). But such reviews rarely occur, and what the writer is most strongly aware of in journalistic notices is a prepared position, a ready-made judgment unqualified by the act of reading, personal malice, the lack of humility appropriate to a self-publicist. Few reviews amount to genuine criticism, yet it is criticism that the writer needs. The academic critic is his ally in the desperate struggle to make words make sense.

I have, then, to posit a situation the reverse of that once romantically held – Walther against the Meistersinger, Dylan Thomas scared of I. A. Richards. The writer's enemies are among the journalists, his friends, at least potentially, in academia. It is only academia, in the post-Leavis era, which is equipped with the tools for literary appraisal. No working author, unless he is David Lodge or Malcolm Bradbury, professionally concerned as an academic with theories of narratology and post-structuralism but also out in the windy field of the practising novelist, can hope to understand fully the processes which produce his art. He recognizes that modern criticism is no longer Quiller-Couch amateurism or the vague Leavisite commitment to "life", but he has not himself either the time or the temperament to arm himself with the right critical battery. He must leave that to the academics.

I say that the academic is potentially the friend of the writer, but, while the whole of the literary past remains to be explicated, there is no possibility of the forging of a healthful relationship between the living author and the professional critic. For caution has to remain: only the future can decide who is as good as, or not too inferior to, William Golding. But, in dealing with the literature of the past, the academic critic can set for the living author the standards by which he would wish to be judged. The reviewer can do nothing for him.

I imply, of course, academic criticism at its best – meaning at its best informed and full of informed insights. It remains difficult, however, to expunge the pejorative which is attached to the term "academic". The academic fugue is form without feeling; one shudders at the notion of the academic, as opposed to campus, novel. There is a load of academic rubbish regularly disgorged by the university presses, lifeless ill-written pseudo-criticism whose only purpose is to gain tenure

for the author. There is also the cashing in, to the end of professional promotion, on a fad which develops into an industry whose operatives ensure it will be self-perpetuating. I am thinking particularly of the academic Joyce industry, which should by now have decided to train its techniques on authors less cultic – H. G. Wells, for instance, or Arnold Bennett. When, in the late 1930s, I first read Joyce, it could never have been dreamt that he would become the occasion of endowed chairs and international conferences. He was banned, a literary outsider. He is less thrilling to read now that the professors have domesticated him.

What is being done to Joyce in the universities exemplifies the dangers of academic leisure, the presence of unformed student minds that have not yet learned to answer back, bookishness, collegial discourse, and sheer professorial ingenuity. There is plenty of wayward trickiness in Joyce, a sufficiency of subtexts, evidence of the language manipulating the author, as well as cabalistic arithmology, but it took Richard Ellmann, after proving himself to be one of the pioneers of textuality, to remind us that *Ulysses* is a novel about the need for love. It seems to me often that what the professional industrialists are doing to Joyce they could well be doing to Ian Fleming and Frederick Forsyth, who are also writers written and could, with sufficient probing and the occasional word conference, disclose marvels of crypto-symbolism. The academic critics have been granted by the over-ingenious French an opportunity to deploy criticism for its own sake, an autonomous craft like juggling. Still, the professors are all we have.

I include among the professors those who merely take on the temporary honorific after displaying, outside academia, the skills that academia is there to promote – men like Edmund Wilson, whose *Axel's Castle* opened to my generation the door to modernism and showed the pundits within the ivied walls how learning could be worn lightly and expressive exactitude be congruent with elegance. The critical spark has to be there to begin with, but only the conditions associated with academia can blow it and make it flare. My own literary career, such as it has been, owes much to certain academics, and the term academic criticism has for me, living outside the walls, no whiff of dead scholarship, condescension, or the disparagement of those who, working with the safe dead, refuse to grant life to the living.

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American notes

Christopher Hitchens

Last month saw the elapse of a quarter of a century - actually, it could only have been a quarter of this century - since the publication of *Catch-22*. You might have expected almost any kind of commemoration for this anniversary except the kind of commemoration it got. As a homage to Joseph Heller, the United States Air Force Academy convened a symposium in Colorado Springs. The head of its English department, who has the oddly innocuous name of Colonel Jack Shuttleworth, announced to the cadets who were present that he did not want them to fall victim "to the Colonel Cathcart of this world". Since none of the cadets had been born when the novel was written or published, this was an unusually potent tribute to the persuasiveness of characterization.

Heller himself was invited to swell the tributes offered by Air Force theologians, sociologists and cultural bird-dogs. He obviously decided not to abuse the hospitality of the USAF, pointing out merely that he had heard that an Air Force uniform needed to be freshly cleaned before it could be repaired. After this, his disclosure, that it had to be in good repair before the laundry would accept it, seemed rather tame. Most striking was his disclosure that the book was originally entitled *Catch-18*, but that the imminence of Leon Uris's *Mila 18* had forced a revision. As in so many other cases, it seems impossible now that the book could have had the same resonance with any other title.

Of course it is true that a US Army Briefing Officer in Vietnam once reported that, "I'm happy to announce our casualties have increased greatly and are now on a level with those of our Marines." But "Catch-22" is more commonly used these days in the semi-affectionate manner which old swears reserve for their recollections of the military bureaucracy. It has joined the company of expressions like the British "Snafu" or the more eloquent American "Fubar" (Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition). There's a watering-hole in Los Angeles called Fubar's, and you don't hear any complaints.

There were complaints, though, about the promiscuity of the USAF in exposing nine hundred cadets to Heller and his works. Norman Podhoretz opened up his batteries at once, accusing the officers and men of a pacifist death wish and a masochistic feebleness. Of the Colonel Jack Shuttleworth I mentioned, Podhoretz exclaimed:

It is perhaps a greater lunacy than any Heller himself finds in the Air Force that a man with ideas like that should be entrusted with the education of young people who are presumably being trained to lead their fellow good guys into battle against their country's enemies. But even more absurd are the cheers that greeted Heller's appearance at the celebration.

Heller has on many occasions denied that his book is antagonistic to American participation in the Second World War - "the good war". He might take some consolation from the ideas that his work is considered by some to be as powerful as the USAF's rival mythologies; a sort of moral equivalent of the "King and Country" debate. In the face of this latest diatribe, he has been too forbearing to mention any coincidence between its author and a certain ambitious magazine editor in *Good As Gold*.

Over the past few years, the *Missouri Review* has been the agency for the bringing to light of several worthy manuscripts. There was the unfinished essay by William Faulkner, and two unpublished plays by Tennessee Williams. At the end of this year, they plan to publish a hitherto unknown story by Mark Twain. It was discovered by one of the *Review*'s editors, Dr Robert Sattlemeyer, while he was doing research on Twain's riverboat years at the archive in the Bancroft library at Berkeley. Running to about five thousand words, and showing signs of being the first two parts of a three-part story, it is a tale of illegitimacy and transgression. I remarked to the editor of *Missouri Review*, Greg Michaelson, that Twain had a fondness for dressing boys and girls up vice versa, and he hypothesized that there was

some connection between this and the riverboat years. I hope to say more about the story nearer the time of publication, but those who want to be sure of a copy should write to the *Missouri Review*, 231 Arts and Science Building, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri 65211.

Those who wondered about the lawsuit against "secular humanist" education that I mentioned (American notes, October 17) may be interested to hear that in the Tennessee case the judge found for the fundamentalist parents and their patron, the Rev Pat Robertson. This verdict vindicates the claim that secular education discriminates against religion and morality. A telling example of what is signified by both the former and the latter is to be found in one of the fundamentalist objections in the case, which was to the teaching of *The Diary of Ann Frank*. Mrs Vickie Frost, one of the plaintiffs, explained that *Ann Frank* was a plea for religious relativism and added, "We cannot be tolerant in that we accept other religious views on an equal basis as ours." Hard to memorize but, then again, difficult to forget.

The amazing success of the new NBC television series, *L. A. Law*, which describes life, liberty and the pursuit of litigation in California, has served to underscore again the pre-eminent position of the lawyer in America. Professor Anthony Chase, then, was more timely than he could have realized with his paper, "Lawyers and Popular Culture: A review of mass media: Portrayals of American attorneys". To be published shortly in the journal of the American Bar Foundation, this explores the lawyer as protagonist from *Young Mr Lincoln* to *Perry Mason* and beyond. In a comment on the former of these two, Chase notes that,

in spite of our ability to trace the positive image of the virtuous lawyer back to 1939, the popular portrayal of lawyers as the backbone of liberty did not become fully integrated and developed within mass culture until 20 years later.

Today, this portrayal wars with the impression of lawyers as parasites, milking doctors, insurance companies and gullible victims alike. The paradigm and perhaps forerunner is Walter Matthau as William Gingrich, the "person-

al injury" specialist in Billy Wilder's *The Fortune Cookie*. Here is the prototype of the ambulance-chaser who has now become a fixture on American screens of all sizes, and in every corner of American life as well. *Lit. Dallas* and *Dynasty*, *L. A. Law* could be described as a pelf-opera, reflecting in this case the national fantasy about the indecent sum of money won and lost in the courts. In *Onyx* Welles's *Lady from Shanghai* the San Francisco attorney Arthur Bannister invites contempt for his insistence that money is all that matters. Today he would be a figure of ridicule if he did anything else. Chase's paper implicitly suggests that things have been all downhill since the *Lady from Shanghai*, saying that Bannister "may, in fact, represent the most vivid characterization in popular culture of the negative image of American attorneys as perceived through their relation to money and power generally and greed in particular." Now that *LA Law* follows *Miami Vice* on Friday nights, a glitzy rehabilitation seems to be under way.

An illustration of the finesse of American law has just come the way of Ian Hamilton, who wants to be the author of "J. D. Salinger: A writing life". Having written the book, at Random House, Hamilton watched five months of dreary litigation in a Manhattan District Court. The reclusive Salinger complained of "intentional piracy" and "blatant infringement of copyright". Having earlier forced Random House to remove some of the dust quotations from the work, he then rather wily sued again because the resulting passages were "paraphrased".

In a two-page handwritten verdict, Judge Pierre Leval found that Hamilton, having unearthed Salinger's letters from university libraries and elsewhere, had merely abstracted facts and ideas - neither of which are protected by copyright. But, obviously loath to dishonour his profession, the judge combined his ruling with a stay against publication of the unoffending work. This gives ground and time for appeal, as well as scope for attorneys.

A small suggestion. Can we not eliminate the redundancy of the acronym WASP? It's not as if there were any BASPs. Doesn't ASP convey precisely the same connotation with even more economy?

TLS Poets' Progress

On Tuesday last week, the Penguin bookshop in Guildford was host to the final event of the TLS "Poets' Progress" - a series of readings in university towns up and down the country by poets closely associated with this paper (regularly printed in its pages, highly regarded by its reviewers and staff, or all of these). Over the last month a total of thirty-five poets have been heard at nine venues in all (an average of four to a reading; Christopher Reid manfully agreeing to read twice). The great and good and renowned were joined on each occasion by younger or less well-established poets, most of them beginning to make their mark with first collections, some making their first appearance in print in the paper, and in person on Poets' Progress (Stephen Romer, Simon Rae, Marion Lomax, Lachlan Mackinnon among them); and by a prizewinner or judge in the TLS/Cheltenham Festival Poetry Competition of this or last year. Most of the readings were held on university premises, and were followed by informal gatherings which - since the principle of the tour was, as far as possible, to get poets away from their home parishes - enabled interested students and other members of the audience to rub shoulders with some perhaps unfamiliar, certainly distantly located figures. Thus, Scotsman Norman MacCaig took the high road to Cambridge, where he had to read to an audience which included the Ulster poet Paul Muldoon, currently at Fitzwilliam College as a visiting Fellow, who himself read, two weeks later, to a small but select band in Bristol; Douglas Dunn, resident in Fife, delighted a large and enthusiastic audience in Exeter; Seamus Heaney read a magnificent series of new poems at King's College, London, and these were counterpointed by the extravagant,

playful poetic disquisitions of New Yorker Tom Disch; Craig Raine and Hugo Williams, closely associated with Oxford and London respectively, trekked to Edinburgh; and so on. Not all the readings were as well attended as they might have been, but even the smaller audiences were attentive and appreciative, and gave rise to the hope that among the faces were those of the next generation's Heaney, Muldoon, Reading, Rumens, Fuller, Adcock, Motion, Porter or Dunn.

Letters

'The Blind Watchmaker'

Sir, - G. B. Keene's letter of October 10 concluded by enquiring, rhetorically, whether the degree of philosophical naivety he had (mistakenly) attributed to me did not amount to "grossly unprofessional misconduct". I objected to this charge of (as I put it) "professional misconduct". He now tells you (Letters, November 7) that my "misquotation" shows how carelessly I read his letter. Can something be "grossly unprofessional conduct" and not be "professional misconduct"?

It is indeed possible that I misunderstood him as seriously as he misunderstands me, for he and I must surely be at cross-purposes. I had not supposed that capital letters were existential quantifiers, nor do I now see any reason to suppose that the use of capitals in expressions purporting to refer to God is an "insidious misuse" which is not "normal philosophical practice". Nor did I suggest that those who denied that God made the world were somehow committed to affirming that He was doing something else at the time (and therefore "committed to the existence of such a being"). Dr Keene is presumably aware that the correct analysis of statements containing expressions whose purported referent is fictitious, or at least doubtfully "real", is a matter of dispute, and has nothing to do with capital letters. Some philosophers contend that such statements as "Thrasymachus disagreed with Socrates" are false if there never was a Thrasymachus outside the pages of Plato's *Republic*; others that they then have no truth-value; others again, of whom I am one, that they may be true of "fictitious entities" which exist merely in *intellect* but not in *re*. This last position seems to me to be in accord with ordinary practice: at the least "Thrasymachus thought exactly the same as Socrates" is more obviously a candidate for falsehood than its denial. I repeat that I did not argue for God's real existence on the basis of any statement that already assumed it, and therefore begged no question at all by my use of capitalized expressions.

As to his last, and more serious point: Keene has given me no reason to retract my suggestion that truth (in which I include truths uncovered by such sciences as biology) is to be reached through love, awe, worship, rather than by seeking to draw the world of all emotional affect (as Monod suggested without any clear acknowledgement of what the effects of such a psychopathic outlook on ordinary living would be like). I do not know if many or any of my philosophical colleagues, once they had understood what I meant, would agree with me. I am content that Aristotle, Plotinus, Aquinas, Spinoza, Berkeley and uncounted others thought the same.

STEPHEN R. L. CLARK.
Department of Philosophy, University of Liverpool,
PO Box 147, Liverpool.
T. A. Birrell's Panizzi Lectures, entitled "The English Monarchs and their Books: From Henry VII to Charles II", will be given on November 20 and 27 and December 4 at 6pm at the British Museum, London WC1.

The State of British History

Sir, - David Cannadine discusses history (October 10) as if it were a corpus of received opinion and information to be digested or rejected by a passive audience ("the public"). But surely it is the stage prior to publication - the gaining and evaluating of the information - which affords the true experience of history, and if so then history was never healthier.

My colleagues in all types of record office would agree that our search rooms are more crowded than ever before with people from all walks of life enjoying the pleasures of historical research at whatever level suits their aims and abilities. And who can doubt that the children of Sapperton school in this county will have gained a taste for history from their recently published researches which they could never have acquired from history as conventionally presented?

Perhaps if David Cannadine and others were less dismissive about "archive grubbers", or even did a little grubbing of their own, they would find reason for greater optimism about the future of history (as well as learning more about it).

D. J. H. SMITH.
County Record Office, Worcester Street,
Gloucester.

'The Church in Crisis'

Sir, - I am puzzled by the suggestion, in George Steiner's review of *The Church in Crisis* by Charles Moore, A. N. Wilson and Gavin Stamp (November 7), that a certain bishop has "made it plain" that the name of Auschwitz "puts in radical question" that of Christ - the more since Steiner follows this by quoting, apparently with approval, a passage from Donald MacKinnon which makes the suggestion absurd.

C. H. SISSON.
Moorfield Cottage, The Hill, Langport, Somerset.

Origins of 'It'

Sir, - Margharita Laski (Letters, November 7) is both right and wrong. "It" was first of all, according to the authors of *The "It" Girls*, "a novella-length story, serialized in Hearst's *Cosmopolitan* in 1926 and then published in book form in America and England in 1927". I never maintained that this book was published in 1926.

They also write: "'It' may not have even been an original idea of Elinor's, it may have been Victorian or Edwardian slang. Kipling certainly used the expression in Elinor's sense in 1904 in *Traffics and Discoveries*" (they then quote the passage from "Mrs Bathurst", not quite accurately). Having read the book I was aware of this.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 303

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than December 5. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that, the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration. Entries, marked "Author, Author 303" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on December 12.

- 1 ha chat chat
châtsinhechul
chachacha - huchacha
shichatsishah
shah shah
tia
- 2 'I'll try the whole cause, and condemn you to death'.
- 3 Thus the lanky henchman who raised affair in the first place dis hench es himself
- Competition No 299
Winners: Aimée Dougl
Answers:
1 Herbert suddenly appeared in the mirror. George rehearsed what she would say about how she wanted her hair done, but he wasn't interested. Solemnly the maestro removed the grubby piece of black ribbon adorning her pony tail, and gravely unravelled the elastic band underneath. He held out his hand to the junior who stood at his side with a loaded tray - "Scalpel", thought George.
Margaret Forster, *George Girl*, chapter 1.
2 In the looking-glass at the hairdresser's, Kate gazed at her face as if it were Edwin's. The bearded young man behind her, sensing restlessness, suggested a coloured rinse. "Rinse" sounded more nonchalant than "dye".
Elizabeth Taylor, *In a Summer Season*, chapter 1.
3 There was a brief silence: Mrs Courcel did not look in the mirror at him to see what he thought of what she thought; she continued calmly to gaze at herself, picking at pieces of her hair with corn-pointed nails, but Gavin looked fleetingly at his own face as a tidal wave of rage and hatred surged up his body... and was astonished to see that it was suffused with a weak (and silly) smile.
Elizabeth Jane Howard, *Getting it Right*, chapter 2.

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COMMENTARY

Tragedy or tinsel

John Weightman

JEAN COCTEAU
La Machine Infernale
Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith

Was Cocteau genuinely talented, or was he, as André Gide and others thought, just a clever self-indulgent and self-advertiser, a flirt flitting between the artistic world and *le beau monde*, and with a gift for producing glittering kitsch of various kinds? Since his death, he has found no great defender in France, so it was all the braver on the part of Simon Callow to translate and put on this adaptation of the Oedipus story, dating from 1934.

Like other neo-classical twentieth-century French plays, it is full of ironies and anachronisms. It begins with a Voice intoning a complete summary of the Oedipus legend, as if the author could not count on his audience ever having heard of it. There follows a parody of the buttressed scene in *Hamlet* with Jocasta, a slightly hysterical Parisian society lady, tottering about on the walls of Thebes in an attempt to question the ghost of Laius about the identity of his murderer. She is accompanied by Tiresias, whom she calls by the pet-name Zizi (zizi is a slang word, applicable to both the penis and the vagina; Tiresias, according to tradition, was endowed with both sexes; the joke is lost, of course, in translation). The Sphinx, Nemesis in the guise of a young woman, is so taken by Oedipus's beauty that she tells him the answer to the riddle, and in effect commits suicide. The wedding-night of Jocasta and Oedipus consists of protracted neo-Freudian badinage, until Tiresias enters and the boastful Oedipus looks into his half-blind eyes and is given a partial, but terrifying, vision of the future. Act Four, which is set seventeen years later at the time of the plague, is an anti-climax, which merely dots the *is* and crosses the *as*, as if Cocteau's inventiveness had run out.

In an enthusiastic programme note, Callow presents the work as a dream-play, composed by Cocteau during his opium period, "a deep and searing cry of compassion for all mankind... caught up in the cogs and wheels of the infernal machine... the hellish machine of the gods". *Une machine infernale* is, actually, a bomb without cogs or wheels, but let that pass; Cocteau himself may have intended a metaphorical extension of the word *machine*. The question is: does he put any really new gloss on this Greek story, incomprehensible to the modern rational mind, about a man being punished for two actions that he commits in all innocence?

In this production, which has the merit of being both careful and highly ingenious, the play comes over to me as an essentially homosexual lament. The most powerful scene is the early one, on the battlements, where Jocasta (Cocteau imagining himself in drag?) raves about the physical charms of a young

soldier, in whom she sees an image of her lost son. The motif is repeated at length in the Sphinx episode, where the humanized goddess likens Oedipus to a god.

Yet surprisingly, he is not a hero; he triumphs not through his wits, but through the automatic operation of his sex-appeal; he is a gigolo conqueror, a show-off, concerned mainly about how to carry the Sphinx's corpse to best effect when he goes to meet the people of Thebes. I am at a loss to know why he should be deflated in this way, since it means that he hasn't the density to be a really tragic figure in the subsequent scenes; he is more like an ageing playboy in a fix. Perhaps Cocteau was implying, with half-conscious love-hatred, that beautiful young men may be empty shells.

But the evening is saved to some extent by the actors. Lambert Wilson, as the handsome narcissist with a tinge of French accent, and Robert Edlison as Tiresias, perform as adequately as the text allows. As for Maggie Smith, she shines like a beacon in the double role of Jocasta and the Cockney-speaking Woman of Thebes. She is a theatrical lady in the grand style, with a voice that melts the howls. We should at least be grateful to Cocteau for providing her with a vehicle, however ramshackle.



"Manao Tupan" (She is haunted by a spirit), a woodcut executed by Gauguin in Tahiti and printed by his son in 1921. It can be seen in Under Cover of Darkness: Night Prints, an Arts Council touring exhibition of prints which is at the DLI Museum and Arts Centre, Durham until December 24 and at Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield from January 10 to February 15, 1987.

Carrying a torch

Randall Stevenson

ALFRED DEMUSSET
Hidden Fires
Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow

Like *A Door Should be Either Open or Shut*, which is currently being staged at the National Theatre (reviewed in TLS, October 17, 1986),

Inside the wail

Julian Barnes

GEORGES FEYDEAU
Scenes from a Marriage
Barbican Theatre

Outside any number of West End theatres, where decent actors made arbitrarily famous by television flog hand-me-down comedy to the coach-trade, you will read that familiar barker's phrase: "Painfully funny". We laugh until it hurts. The Royal Shakespeare Company's *Scenes from a Marriage* might advertise under the same slogan but a different emphasis. We laugh (when we do) because it hurts, because that hurt is happening to others.

Not to us. The first of these three Feydeau plays, linked and adapted by Peter Barnes, begins and ends with a patient screaming in a dentist's chair. The second play also echoes to a howl: that of the dentist's wife, now about to give birth. The third play needs no dominating vocal image, since we understand the trilogy's theme: a scream of pain at the abyss known as marriage. We are inside the wail.

The three plays, dating from 1908, 1911 and 1916, are late and sour; in 1909 Feydeau moved out of the matrimonial home, and we are in-

vited to consider them autobiographical in spirit, if not more. They are played in reverse order of composition: we start, therefore, with the most misanthropically screaming of the three, *Hortense a dit "Je m'en fous"*, and end with the most normally farcical, *Feu la mère de Madame*. This requires some (not always successful) inner chronological juggling; more significantly, it means that the final play, the lightest in mood on the page, becomes infected by our attendance at the two previous cat-fights between the wimpish Lucien and his silly-shrew wife Yvonne.

This directs us immediately to the main interest, and difficulty, of Barnes's adaptation: how the farce beds down with the tragedy of marital hatred. We're all grown up about mixed genres nowadays, of course, so we don't jib when the props of farce – swinging doors, naughty maids, spraying liquids (wine, hot water, mouthwash, macaroni cheese) – occupy the same stage as furious domestic tirades of a more Scandinavian nature. But integrating the two strands remains very hard. Farce depends on its driving, roller-coaster effect, and if it stops too long for a serious complaint against life (and "too long" here can mean as little as five seconds) it has to be strainingly bump-started. On the other hand, for a spectacle of marital rage to touch us, the characters have to be given time to display themselves as more than seaside-postcard types. When the integration works in this production, the potential for lemon-sucking jollity is plain. The middle play contains a passage where Yvonne as a pregnant woman asks her downtrodden husband to put their expected child's newly bought chamber pot on his head. He declines, she insists, the mother-in-law joins in; Lucien's obduracy and Yvonne's frustration bring on her contractions, whereupon with grim reluctance he places the item on his head.

Such stretches – painfully funny – are too rare in *Scenes from a Marriage*; but a serious attempt at the probably impossible is always more stirring than another untroubled revival, and it's a pity that early critical reaction seems to have scared away customers (three hours have now come down to two and a quarter, by the way). Gerald Howland's revolving platform set makes you want to climb on to it and order dinner, and there is also a very jaunty all-female saxophone quartet who play linking music through the production.

initially used only as a decoy or "candlebearer" in her affair with Clavaroche. Fortunio himself is the subject of several phases of sentimental education which partly amend and partly vindicate his intense Romantic idealism – processes perhaps related to Musset's own recent experience of an affair with George Sand. These aspects of *Le Chandelier* ("The Candle-Bearer") remain rather obscured in the Citizens' production. Roberta Taylor's Jacqueline seems too simply a schemer to be plausibly redeemable or attractive: even her absurdly elaborate hairstyle makes her too firmly complicit with the twirly coiffure and empty elegance of Clavaroche. Garry Cooper's gaunt, portraiture of Fortunio works hard to communicate the character's ardent intensity, but his efforts are undermined by comic effects which rarely allow the audience to move from giggly scepticism to any degree of sympathy.

Such sympathy may be especially hard to generate in a modern audience inclined to treat Romantic idealism as almost as much of a cliché as the vanity of Clavaroche. Musset was, after all, a self-proclaimed "child of the century": by 1907 *Le Chandelier* had already been converted into a straightforward musical comedy, *Fortunio*. The Citizens' excellent wit and elegance perhaps offer Musset's work as good a chance as any for promotion to a more secure place in the modern British theatre. *Hidden Fires*, however, does enough to suggest that even – perhaps especially – in a post-Romantic age, more might have been made of the prospect of the candle-bearer's bright ideals shining into Jacqueline's world of compromise and evasion.

Le Chandelier belongs to a minor phase of Musset's Comédies et Proverbes. In the Citizens' version, *Hidden Fires*, which is at its best in developing the stock comic apparatus of a proverbial or perennial central situation, it seems slight, though entertaining. Giles Haverall's gangling frame contorts itself into apt expressions of Maitre André's jealousy, while his wife Jacqueline's lower Clavaroche is portrayed by Ciaran Hinds in a perfect caricature of farouche vanity. His posing and pouting firmly establish Clavaroche's central interest in himself and his appearance rather than his love, a commitment confirmed when, in the best of several nocturnal comic scenes, he enters dressed in little except a large face-bandage designed to protect his magnificent moustache from the ravages of love-making.

Other aspects of Robert David MacDonald's translation emphasize this sort of lightness, wit, even farce. The dialogue is easy and idiomatic, often pleasantly backed with music. The set is colourful and ingenious: panels slide shut to separate the foreground as an elegant boudoir, or open to reveal the full depth of the stage beautifully arranged as a formal garden. Patrick Hannaway develops the latter area as his domain, fine comic timing making much of the tiny part of the gardener; the obsessive grooming of some rather obscene topiary extending the ideas of artifice and narcissism embodied in Clavaroche.

Musset's original, however, is not solely occupied with artificial emotions and stock characters. Jacqueline, for example, moves through some interesting changes of mind and heart under the pressure of genuine, if extravagant, young love she is offered by Fortunio.

COMMENTARY

A monkey celebration

Donald Mitchell

PEKING OPERA
Havoc in Heaven
The Complexion of Peach Blossom
Sadler's Wells

Some of the best Chinese restaurants at home and out East are also the noisiest. There is nothing inappropriate in Chinese eyes (or to Chinese ears) about the consumption of food to the accompaniment of a fine old din. Like-wise Peking Opera: the greater the excitement of the events on the stage, the busier and louder becomes the percussion department, seated in the wings. The percussion indeed – a small but very powerful ensemble of cymbals, gong, woodblock (clappers?) and drums – is at the very heart of the genre, providing not only the sonorous equivalent of the many fights and struggles we see before our eyes (the end of *Havoc in Heaven*, based on the novel we know as *Monkey* in Arthur Waley's translation, was like nothing so much as a battle scene from a Kurosawa film, thus reminding us yet again of what Japan owes to China) but also the wonderful percussion counterpoint (or counterpart, rather) to every movement and gesture of the action, whether large or small.

The fantastic precision of the matching up of physical prowess and percussive sound-track is

one of Peking Opera's most striking features, and though the overall impression is one of unremitting exuberance and clatter, there are many instances when the relationship of movement and music is of great delicacy and refinement. At the performance I attended *Havoc in Heaven* was the principal item. It is a tale in which the Monkey King (superbly undertaken by Mr Han Zengxiang, both an innocent and a wide-boy) wreaks endless mischief, is singled out for retribution but instead succeeds in routing the assembled forces of the mighty, the Generals of Heaven. It is a wonderfully anti-establishment piece in theme and execution, which all audiences of whatever national origins will interpret in their own way; we are all oppressed by Establishments and we all have urgent need of a Monkey King to raise our morale. It is no accident, naturally, that the monkey enjoys such special mythological status in East and South-East Asia and the sub-continent, where the animal and particularly the monkey kingdom is so close to that of the mortals. One of the aspects of Peking Opera that interested me most was the associations one could perceive with related musico-theatrical forms outside China. For example, I was strongly reminded of the machinations of Hanuman, the Monkey General, in the Ramakian, the great Thai dance drama, no less comical and mischievous than the Monkey King from China, and the special place the monkey

occupies in the dance and drama of Bali, where a whole number, the Ketjak, is a monkey celebration.

Peking Opera not only combines all kinds of ancient skills – acrobatics, juggling, wrestling, mime, speech, song, dance, and a dozen other dexterities (including the execution of an admirable watercolour sketch by Madame Wu Suqiu as part of her performance in *The Complexion of Peach Blossom*) but also reveals itself to be a source for and influence on much of the theatrical/dance/musical cultures we encounter in China's South-East Asian neighbours. This is not to deny Peking Opera its uniqueness, nor to fail to acknowledge the traditions elsewhere that have established their own unmistakable profiles. But after this exhilarating evening I left with a distinct sense of an extraordinary unity of culture whose fount was China and which has been so astonishingly widely disseminated down the centuries (the only comparable source of influence would be India).

To return for a moment to those dedicated instrumental players in the wings. There among them were the ubiquitous bamboo flutes, the strident so-na (a kind of raucous Chinese oboe), and two Chinese fiddles – all of these instruments that we meet outside China (though differently named), and not in museums but in the hands, and at the mouths, of skilled and active performers. Incidentally,

it is the gentler, sweeter voices of the flutes and strings that are heard more prominently in the *Peach Blossom* item, a romantic story of subtle charm. There is a good deal of spoken dialogue here and it is a pity that some way has not been found of offering the audience a parallel translation. *The Complexion of Peach Blossom* in some respects is nearer to our conception of "opera". There is even what seemed to be a strophic "aria" for the heroine, a number in which one becomes emphatically conscious of an overriding feature of the music heard all evening: that the only counterpoint to relieve an otherwise resolutely sustained unison shared between singers and instrumentalists is when Madame Wu's delivery of the identical melody is rhythmically – albeit fractionally – out of step with that of her colleagues. The rhythmic displacement and consequent "counterpoint" is as momentous in its way as the modification of rhythm or pitch after prolonged repetition in current minimalist scores. We can only be grateful that the Chinese have restored to themselves their traditional culture and bring such vitality and brilliant gifts to the performance of it, inside and outside the mainland. It is a timely reminder of what is at stake when traditional and genuinely popular arts of the East are threatened by the horrible dogma of "cultural revolution" or by the onslaught of de-humanizing, robotic and glum "pop" from the West.

The voice of the future

David Nokes

JOHN MORTIMER
Paradise Postponed
Thames Television

In his poem "I remember, I remember", Philip Larkin pays tribute to an adolescence of non-events. No suburban epiphanies marked his *rites de passage*; no routine miracles hailed his coming. Later, when the epochal events of his generation were taking place, Larkin was always somewhere else, usually on a train or to Hull. How different from the lives of John Mortimer's characters. No political traumas or social trend in post-war Britain would be complete, it seems, without the participation of a Simcox or a Titmuss or a Strove. From their HQ in the Thames Valley these characters chart the symbolic geography of British politics from Suez to the Falklands. They wear the battle honours of their generation, Aldermaston, Grosvenor Square, Oremham Common (though this last is implausibly renamed Worsfield Common). They are the refracting glass of post-war fashion, from trad jazz to King's Road coffee bars, from flower power to high-rise flats. Simcox and Co. while not exactly at the centre of events, are always in the wings, within hailing range of a satirical aphorism. *Paradise Postponed* thus contrives to combine re-cycled autobiography with a kind of elegiac pageant, producing an *All Our Yesterdays* with epigrams.

Interviewed on the *South Bank Show*, Mortimer confessed his admiration for a Dickensian style of heightened realism, "writing with one foot off the ground". This one-legged Dickensian gait is only too evident in the narrative of *Paradise Postponed*. The paraphernalia of mysterious bequests and dark secrets is pure Victorian pastiche; the names, Doughty Strove and Tom Nowt, Nubble and Benjamin K. Bugloss, have the true Dickensian hollowness; the sudden deaths (or supposed deaths) at the ends of episodes seem a self-conscious hop back to a nineteenth-century form of serial composition.

In the Christmas episode the literary echoes become positively deafening. Henry Simcox, the script-writer son (played by Peter Egan), at the midnight service, the camera plays insistently over the faces of the congregation of latter-day pilgrims, from the knight, to the squire, to the parson, to ram home the parallel. The events of the episode draw a fierce contrast between Dickensian myth and domestic reality.

This literary style extends beyond the narrative into the mouths of the characters. Each one of them, whatever their other failings, has

the ability to turn a phrase. Sad old Sir Nicholas, whose life consists of cultivating begonias which he despises, can still deliver a stinging riposte to his wife's nostalgia for frolics in the black-out: "I'm sorry we couldn't keep the war going to entertain you a little longer." Even Bulstrode, the new bland vicar, a man otherwise innocent of wit, remarks of Henry Simcox: "Powerful turn of phrase – no wonder he's always off to America." When Bulstrode's wife declares her membership of Women Against Rape, Dorothy Simcox, magnificently played by Annette Crosbie, enquires with mock innocence, "Are some women in favour of it?" Colin Blakely, as Dr Salter, delivers his own favourite aphorism – "They do you a wonderful death on the hunting-field" – rather too often. When he attempts to follow his own prescription the narrative finally seems to have lifted both feet into the air. At the start of the next episode, however, we find that he has achieved not a magnificent death but an ignominious paralysis, further confirming the superiority of art over life.

Where Mortimer is most truly and successfully Dickensian is in his creation of a grotesque. Leslie Titmuss, outstandingly played by David Threlfall, is the petty-bourgeois Frankenstein of Thatcher's Britain. Taking his morality from Tebbit and his vowel sounds from the BBC, Titmuss is a masterpiece of self-righteous opportunism. The serial charts the rise of Titmuss's people. He uses the phrase "my people" three times, and each time his tone tells us more about a political era than any amount of location shots in coffee-bars. The first time, at the Young Conservatives' Ball, he gets it wrong. He uses the phrase in embarrassment, as a euphemism and an evasion, and it rings as false as his dickie-bow and Moss Bros suit. The second time, in the Stewards' Enclosure, he uses it as a provocation, causing embarrassment to the patricians, rather than suffering it himself. At the selection meeting to choose a new Conservative candidate, however, he uses it in triumph, speaking as the voice of the future. His people have inherited, if not the earth, at least the Tory Party.

Despite the contrivances of the plot, *Paradise Postponed* is an undoubted success as a piece of television. The camera-work and locations throughout are excellent, and the acting is of the highest standard. Michael Hordern for once has a part which fully exploits his mannerisms, and Jill Bennett is magnificent as Lady Grace Fanner. Zoë Wanamaker's portrayal of Lady Grace's unloved daughter Charlie is remarkable. With her wide-set eyebrows and sudden tantrums her face is a map of downward mobility. In this world of lost emotions, she is the martyr to belief.

Imitating the Ancients

Frances Spalding

Graham Sutherland, The Early Years 1921-40
Goldsmiths' Gallery, until December 3

This exhibition ends with a fair representation of what is nowadays regarded as Graham Sutherland's foremost achievement: a reinvigoration of the British landscape tradition



"Hangar Hill", 1929, an etching by Graham Sutherland, from the exhibition reviewed here. Photograph by courtesy of Lott & Gerrish.

through his discovery of Pembrokeshire, an area in which, as he observed, there were "ready-made" subjects to paint. Small, notational sketches, watercolour studies and finished oils allow us to watch his method of paraphrasing appearances; to observe the romantic and possibly subconscious impulses that combine with his desire to simplify and synthesize landscape impressions into a new logic. At the start of this show Sutherland's vision is of a very different order. Shown here, alongside work by other of his contemporaries in the "Goldsmiths' School of Etchers", his early prints uphold a view of England as pastoral idyll, a haven of fertility, unbroken traditions, peace and delight. Thus the visitor enters a world of nostalgic harmony and ends in another, darker, more menacing and tinged with prophetic disquiet.

What is surprising is that, despite these two contrasting styles and ideologies, certain characteristics recur and evolve throughout. One is Sutherland's use of black. At Goldsmiths, where he studied for five years in the 1920s, he assimilated and then reacted against the impressionistic style of etching associated with Seymour Haden, Whistler and others, and began heavily working his plates. This tendency was endorsed when in 1925 a fellow student

discovered a late print by Samuel Palmer, "The Herdsman's Cottage", in which the entire image is built up out of a dense network of variegated lines. Sutherland admired its luminosity, "bit" his plates still deeper and never forgot that black, paradoxically, can create a sensation of light. Black also evokes a mood of foreboding in his Welsh landscapes and makes emphatic his structural use of shadows and line.

Writing of Pembrokeshire in his now famous "Welsh Sketch Book" letter, Sutherland mentioned his desire to realize "the enveloping quality of earth". This also looks back to Palmer who, with other of Blake's followers, was rediscovered in a major Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition in 1926. For a while afterwards Sutherland and his Goldsmiths' colleagues dressed in imitation of the Ancients and went on visits to Shoreham. This current exhibition includes items by Blake (but sadly not his illustrations to Dr Thornton's *Virgil* which Sutherland greatly admired), Palmer, Calvert and Richmond, and allows us to trace a lineage that resurfaces in Sutherland's "The Village". Here, as in Palmer's "Valley of Vision", nature is benign and all-encompassing; the ploughed fields, densely hatched, celebrate careful husbandry and fill almost the entire image. This print impressed F. L. Griggs, whom Sutherland met at this time and visited in Chipping Camden. He too is included in this show, but, aside from his often reproduced "Duntisbourne Rouse", is found in this company to be more craftsman than mystic. It is Paul Drury and Robin Tanner, fellow students at Goldsmiths, who come closest to the magical intensity felt in Sutherland's "The Village".

The catalogue to the show is a botched effort. Sutherland's biographer, Roger Berthoud, is referred to as Berthould throughout, and the attempts at fashionable ideas strain belief. It is deduced that, because Sutherland's mother was a "wonderful gardener", he associated landscape with his mother's body and in Wales sought a return to the "unified androgynous self", a fusion of the maternal body with his own. If there is a fusion of opposites in his Welsh landscapes, such as the 1938 etching "Clegyr-Boia", with its strong lights and darks, soft and sharp outlines, it is indicative of a broader view of nature than the pastoral ideal allowed, one which encompasses life and death, and in which a sense of unlocated fear is never far off.

The exhibition, *Painting in Scotland: The Golden Age 1707-1843* is at the Tate Gallery until January 4, 1987. Formerly shown at the Talbot Rice Art Centre as part of the Edinburgh Festival, it was reviewed in the TLS of August 22

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Absence into presence: changes in literary criticism

John Lucas

"On December 10, 1966, literary criticism changed." An overstatement, of course, but one with more than a little truth to it. Certainly, nobody looking back over the past twenty years' events in English studies can fail to be impressed by the ways in which it has all altered. Not always for the best, it has to be admitted. Jerome McGann and others have rightly complained that historical scholarship has fallen victim to the new directions (and directors) of literary theory and criticism, not so much because it has been denounced as that it has been taken for granted. Unfortunately, all too often what had been taken for granted is precisely what needed investigation. This includes something so vast as the problem of periodicity at one end and, at the other, verifiable accuracy of a literary text. There are other problems, some of which I will touch on later. Nevertheless, when all these are taken note of, the fact remains that during the past two decades English studies have undergone a radical and invaluable transformation, including the questioning of their very status and identity. This transformation has been made possible as well as being reflected by the intervention of a growing number of commentators – critics and theorists – whose works elude each other for space on the library shelves of those institutions of higher education where the transformation has largely been accomplished. It is impossible to tell how much of this work will last. Some of it already has a very dated look, though I do not think this matters. Criticism ought to be read in order that it may be put aside and it is not being cynical to suggest that very little criticism of the past twenty years will be read in twenty years' time.

For what has mattered about this period is less individual work than collective enterprise. The real gains have occurred in various collaborative efforts – identifiable through a number of journals such as *Literature and History* and series like *New Accents* – and it is essential to note that these have exactly coincided with that expansion of higher education, especially in the polytechnics, which was looked forward to with such fear and loathing by many self-appointed guardians of culture and the health of English studies. Amis's "more will mean worse" can be set alongside Leavis's contention that it was "obvious" that only a few could benefit from the study of literature, as examples of a defensive conservatism which, in the event, has been proved ludicrously wrong. More has meant better, and this includes better criticism. The major reason for this is the arrival in academic institutions of students, admittedly in still disgracefully insufficient numbers, who by their very presence forced a rethinking of such questions as the nature of literary studies and of what they are meant to achieve. The rethinking inevitably prompted theoretical considerations, these led to further questions, the questions led to further theories . . . and so on.

I do not mean to suggest that the theories

were necessarily new. Most had, in fact, been developed much earlier in the century, in France, Germany and Russia. But their availability and relevance were not perceived in Britain and, I guess, North America until a new, more properly representative and aggressive generation of students required those who taught them, and who increasingly derived from similar social circumstances, to see that much which had previously been taken for granted about literary studies was problematic in the extreme. The collaborative enterprises I have mentioned sprang from an awareness of this fact, and it is hardly surprising that they should have done so. As has been famously pointed out: "Mankind always takes up only those problems it can solve, since . . . the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation."

Not everybody, it must be admitted, sees things this way. There are still a number of belletristic wine-tasters of literature who offer for inspection a "refined" taste, as though it and the "poetic sensibility" that goes with it can be said to exist as something other than an attempt to place prejudice beyond the reach of argument. For this dying breed the text remains a sacred mystery, to be worshipped from afar, and always under the instructions of the high priests of the temple. It is no doubt painful for them to realize that their attitude to the text is itself a matter for inquiry. But so it is, and indeed the major revolution of the past twenty years has been focused precisely here: on attitudes to or relationships with the text. To speak with what I hope is permissible looseness, the impact made by feminist criticism and structuralism – often inextricable, sometimes breaking apart from each other – has been to demonstrate that the proper subject for literary studies is not so much text as the relationship between text and reader, and that the text cannot be said to have a meaningful existence outside of that relationship. I have to say that I think the "problematicizing" of this relationship has been consistently over-theorized and also that while certain procedures and assumptions have rightly had their "privileged" status challenged, there has been a marked reluctance to challenge the "privileging" of the challengers. In other words, too much attention has been paid to certain theories and theoreticians. "The things we must believe are few and plain" – as long, that is, as "we" is not used coercively. On the other hand, it would be foolish to deny that the advantages have far outweighed the disadvantages.

Perhaps the greatest achievement has been the decisive challenge to the "canon" of "English" "literature". This is because all three terms have been put to the test of sceptical enquiry and have been found lacking. What they principally lacked was a sense of their own history. This has now been supplied, and as a result the canon can be seen to be the development of a form of cultural orthodoxy whose exclusions were as telling as the manner of producing those it included. Radical rereadings have challenged that manner and there have been some important successes in turning absences into presences. Blake, Dickens, Hardy, Lawrence, have broken through the monolithic surface presented by orthodoxy, and the reason is plainly that their work allows students to gain a purchase on those issues which relate most powerfully to their own lives. The old guard can hardly complain of this. They liked to insist that literature helped to teach "us" how to live. Now that the composition of "us" has altered, it follows that there are good reasons for "us" recognizing, say, that Dickens is a far greater novelist than Thackeray. (A fact which vast numbers of readers outside the academies have never had any difficulty in recognizing, and it is of course, an increasing number of those readers, or their descendants, who have become "us".)

As far as women's writing is concerned, turning absences into presences is a good deal more difficult, for reasons which, in their different ways, Dale Spender and Julia Swindells, among others, have examined. Yet having said that, I have immediately to add that feminist critics and historians have been extremely resourceful in recovering forgotten or hidden writers. In doing so, they have effectively achieved more by way of disrupting the canon

than those who, while speaking of the need to challenge it, nevertheless give every appearance of working contentedly within it.

And it is here that we come to the source of the major problems now facing critical theory and practice. One way of identifying this is to point to the fact that, as Terry Eagleton has said in *The Function of Criticism*, "criticism itself has become part of the culture industry". Criticism cannot be separated out from the predicament facing modernism: works which were intended to challenge or repudiate the process of absorption into capitalist society have been effortlessly absorbed. Even the more rebarbative texts have been absorbed as commodity fetishism. This has often enough been remarked. What has been insufficiently noted, however, is that the culture industry proposes and disposes. A vital consequence of this is that the industry has a large say in what is acceptable or otherwise. It is not an absolutely controlling say, of course, otherwise those recent presences of which I have spoken would continue to be absences. But it remains the case that publishing companies who each year record vast post-tax profits nevertheless are so completely guided by commercial considerations that only with the greatest reluctance can they be persuaded to bring back texts by writers not considered part of the canon. Much criticism therefore remains within the limits set by the culture industry. It is the canonical texts which tend to be reread; others are passed by in silence. Thus, to take an example where I can speak from experience, it is very difficult to dislodge a common view of the 1930s as the Auden generation, for the simple reason that the texts which would challenge that view are by and large not in print. What this leads to is, I think, a disturbing complacency among those who ought to be disrupting complacency.

"Socialist criticism cannot conjure a counterpublic sphere into existence; on the contrary, that criticism cannot fully exist until such a sphere has been fashioned," Eagleton again. Yet the counter-public sphere *does* exist, in potential if not in fact. It is surely to be found in those institutions of higher education which have so successfully repudiated what seemed, twenty or so years ago, abiding and unbudgeable orthodoxies. Nor does it much matter that such a sphere is in a sense institutionalized. One of the great achievements of recent theory has been to direct students precisely towards the problems of institutionalization. As a result, we are all better able to recognize and so challenge the institutions in which we find ourselves. I therefore cannot accept Eagleton's claim that although modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolute State, it has in effect ended up "as a handful of individuals reviewing each other's books". This makes sense only if these same individuals use the presumed absence of the

counter-public sphere as an excuse for occupying a small play-world of abjectly institutionalized criticism – whether nominally of the left or of the right – which is sealed, from the inside, against any intrusive force.

To put the matter this way is, I accept, to run the risk of simplifying what are extremely complex issues. Yet this much at least is true: that the privileging of theory and, indeed, certain theoreticians, has had the harmful effect of deflecting inquiry away from where it should be directed, which is towards those absent presences and present absences whose texts ought to be our major concern. It isn't enough to explain such absences by reference to orthodoxy. What is needed is the privileging or "prioritizing" of, say, William Hale White and Robert Tressell over E. M. Forster; of John Clare over Tennyson; of . . . but the list is endless. Nor will it do to say that there are no texts in print of these and the others, for these mostly are. And even if there weren't, affairs could and should be rectified by the kind of collective agreement to publish which has marked the emergence of something so entirely admirable as Nottingham Drama Texts, whose policy of putting out good, cheap, well-produced editions of a range of Renaissance texts, and more recently texts from the modern period, is making possible important critical interventions into the debate about how concepts of periodicity come to be formed, by whom, for whom, with what authority.

It is here that the asserted absence of that counter-public sphere can be most decisively challenged. For it is here that the challenge to the supremacy of commercial publishing can be put. And not merely as a matter of the availability of texts. Most criticism ought also to be able to benefit, for most critics ought to welcome the chance to dispute the power of the book. Who needs books? They cost too much, they are usually of an artificial length (why do contracts so often stipulate 80,000 words? There's nothing inherently proper about that number) and because they take so long to produce they cannot concern themselves with issues of the moment. We could therefore get along perfectly well with fewer books. We certainly need to undermine the book's authority. To do this we need to make critical intervention more rapid, surprising, more readily – because more cheaply – available. We need it to be strategically alert to those many issues which, when they are once raised, can be absorbed or discarded as best seems fit. We need a criticism in which more can actively participate. In short, we need a war of the pamphlets. It's worth remembering the last time there was such a war was also the last time England came near to producing that counter-public sphere which most of us think desirable even if some, perhaps too much in thrall to the book, think it unlikely we can now produce.

The right to be different

Philip Thody

TERRY KEEFE
French Existential Fiction: Changing moral perspectives
250pp. Croom Helm. £19.95.
0 7099 3107 7

Terry Keefe has chosen a very fruitful way of studying the novels of Simone de Beauvoir, Camus and Sartre. Instead of linking their fiction to their philosophical or political ideas, he has looked at them as authors explaining our relationship to ourselves, to other people, and to society in general. The moral concerns which run through the novels provide, as he points out, one of the main reasons why these writers have remained so popular with American and British adolescents.

Keefe divides their work into three phases: the "pre-war" stories; the "wartime" novels; and the "post-war" stories. Sartre's failure to complete *Les Chênes de la liberté* makes him fade out rather before the third and final stage, but his absence enables Keefe to make some intriguing comparisons between Camus and Beauvoir. In spite of the distinct lack of sympathy that existed between them, they did, as he observes, have "a very great deal in common" in their outlook on post-war Western so-

ciety". Neither liked it, and they agreed in condemning its materialism. More particularly, both Camus and Beauvoir gave up creating heroes who were able to judge or even threaten the society in which they lived. Instead, they began presenting people who, like Clarence in *La Chute*, were acutely aware of being on the receiving end of moral judgment. In this context, Keefe makes a particularly interesting point about the treatment of mental illness. Sartre's *Erostrate* was undoubtedly mad, his Roquentin behaves very peculiarly at times, and even the sun-loving Mersault in *L'Étranger* occasionally shows schizophrenic tendencies. But while we are invited to see their oddness as placing them above the more organized lunacy of society as well as apart from it, the emphasis in such novels as *Les Femmes d'Alger* or *La Chute* or *Le Peuple vainqueur* is different. Society may still be mad, but the hopes of changing it which had inspired some of the wartime attitudes of all three authors, if not the books they actually wrote, have gone. Society may not be justified in locking up the isolated individual because he is not quite right in the head, but the authentic existence of the individual has rather lost the right to be different. How long will it be, one wonders, before the realization of this change seeps through to the sixth-formers and makes them seek elsewhere for their literary heroes.

A lifelong fidelity to failure

Alan Jenkins

SAMUEL BECKETT
The Complete Dramatic Works
476pp. Faber. £12.50.
0571 138 21 7
ENOCH BRATER (Editor)
Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context
238pp. Oxford University Press. £16.50.
019 504001 5
RICHARD ELLMANN
Samuel Beckett: Nayman of Noland
31pp. Available free from the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
0844 0515 9
LINDA BEN-ZVI
Samuel Beckett
230pp. Boston: Twayne. \$16.95.
08057 6912 9
MICHAEL SHERINGHAM
Beckett: "Molloy"
88pp. Grant and Cutler. Paperback, £2.70.
07293 0218 0
JOHN CALDER, MARTIN ESSLIN, BILLIE WHITELAW, DAVID WARRILOW and others
As No Other Dare Fall: For Samuel Beckett on his 80th birthday
135pp. Calder. £10.95.
07145 4077 3

I don't know when I died. It always seemed to me I died old, about ninety years old, and what years . . . But this evening, alone in my icy bed . . . I'll try and tell myself another story, to calm myself, and it's there I'll be old, old . . .

So wrote Samuel Beckett, aged forty. His narrators and monologues have always spoken of themselves as if they were of immense age; and now Beckett himself is eighty. That fact – no great cause of rejoicing, one imagines, to an author who has gone on telling stories, "to calm himself" – has occasioned a flurry of activity among those who make it their business to know such things (more volumes of exegesis, conferences, essays by divers hands). It has also brought stage productions, radio broadcasts and a handsome *Complete Dramatic Works* for the benefit of those who simply know about him, who continue to be disturbed and oddly appealed by his art – oddly, because art here is an ostensibly comportsless business, a "bow tie," as Beckett has said, "about a throat cancer".

Less brutally, that art could be said to reflect Beckett's belief that "anyone nowadays who pays the slightest attention to his experience finds it is the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er". Those whose business it is to know tend to have fewer doubts: "now that Beckett is eighty, it is time to put Beckett in context", declares Enoch Brater, editor of *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*, who is capable of that impertinence presumably only because he can also comment sentences such as "Beckett's fictional stylists format their encounters in specifically dialogic shape". Brater's accomplices include critics of doyen(ne) status (Martin Esslin, Ruby Cohn) and, among others, Keir Elam, who tries a lot harder than most ("Indeed, the deictic evasions of Beckett's Mouth might be a dramatization of, or reflection on, the classic essay on the function of the 'I', Benveniste's 'On Subjectivity in Language' . . .") but who still finds it necessary to point out that the "tensions" expressed in *Not I* are not "merely formal", and thinks that Beckett wrote a book called *Nouvelles textes pour rien*.

Of course there is better, much better than this in the book, but *Beckett at 80* . . . manages to miss most of the implications of Beckett's being eighty, and has little to say (with one or two exceptions) about either his personal or artistic context. Richard Ellmann, another distinguished knower, is fitfully illuminating about both in his monograph *Nayman of Noland* (the text of a lecture delivered last year at the Library of Congress), in which he traces connections between Beckett and his compatriots Wilde, Yeats and Joyce. Linda Ben-Zvi's "critical introduction" is straightforward, offers some insights; but holds nothing for the initiated that they might not glean from more tracing and more elegantly written studies by Hugh Kenner, Laurence Harvey or Vivian Mercier. *The Feast of St. As No Other Dare Fall*, is a very mixed bag, with more from the professionals, a lame spoof on them by Colin

Duckworth, and a number of tributes from those who have worked closely with Beckett in more exhilarating contexts, one would think, than that of the seminar room: actors and actresses, his American, German and English publishers. There is also an extraordinary and unfamiliar text by Beckett himself, and more will be heard of that later. But too nearly for comfort, the book bears out John Calder's opening remark, "Samuel Beckett's admirers are incapable of keeping quiet." The less exacting of them are moved to imitation ("Can't endure the pain once not felt, necessarily so. What now? Still gratitude for the profundity of realization. Might not have come from any other. Might never have come. What then?") or elegy ("He puts the books and the remains of the Irish whiskey in his soft leather satchel as they leave the room. In the narrow lift, Etrog thinks: 'This is the closest I will ever be to Samuel Beckett.'"). Calder himself, in a moment of lucidity, speaks of "the relevance of Beckett's writing to getting through life", and, relatedly, notes that writing's "extraordinary unity: the preoccupations were all there at the beginning". In support he adduces Beckett's quoting from Leopardi, first in *Proust* (1931) but still, apparently, today "in conversation", words that describe "Beckett's creative exhaustion, from which, paradoxically and miraculously, his writing emerges. . . . In noi cari inganni / non che la speme, il desiderio e spento". But can "creative exhaustion" feel the same for the man of eighty as it did for the brilliant, disturbed student of twenty-four, shaping some dark promptings into elegant prose?

In most of Beckett's youthful work – stories or poems – a battle is being fought between rage and art, and art usually loses. *Proust* is different, not only for the insights it contains, powerful if distorting, into Proust, into Art, Memory and Time, but in its repertoire of provocation: for example, "Whatever opinion we may be pleased to hold on the subject of death, we may be sure that it is meaningless and valueless. Death has not required us to keep a day free." Ninety-odd pages in a similar vein launch a finely calculated, scholarly attack on scholarship and criticism, on the bourgeois preference for "the calendar of fact" over "the calendar of feeling", and on "the haze of our smug will to live, our pernicious and incurable optimism".

This states a condition, the condition of having been born, or rather of having been born Samuel Beckett. The plays, statements only of themselves ("Hamm as stated, Clov as stated, together as stated", Beckett put it), might draw on the ferocity of that early vision. But what strikes us as we read the *Complete Dramatic Works* and/or remember various productions is not merely the gain in wit or invention by the change from philosopher-critic to creative artist, from *Proust* to, say, *All That Fall* (1957), then the further gain in compression and intensity from *All That Fall* to, say, *Footfalls* (1975). Verbal echoes, images, motifs, even props (urns, shrouds, darkened rooms, faint light, windows, candles, alarm clocks, dressing gowns, long coats, capacious bags, a ruined folly, wheat, sails, eyes, tears, tattered dresses, snatches of verse, white, black, painkillers, refuse, mothers, fathers, small children) recur throughout, but they seldom have the same charge from one play to another. So with the preoccupations that assail us in *Proust* and *Endgame*, *Eh Joe*, *That Time* or *Rockaby* alike, for they too are subject to the passing of time. Those elements in the Proustian "equation", time, habit, memory, need, loss, boredom, love, desire and death, are, consistently from *Godot* onwards, the themes of Beckett's dramatic writing. In the *Complete Dramatic Works* these themes have flesh, substance and weight – Beckett's words even at their most minimal, or their most seemingly remote, are never without that kind of "realism" and solidity. But words will not stay still; they may be "looked back over", but in doing that we are also, now, looking back over the lifetime Beckett has spent writing them. That is Calder's "relevance": all right, and with a vengeance.

Many Beckett plays orchestrate the slow ebbing away of a life in time and the simultaneous movement of the mind backwards in memory, but *Krapp's Last Tape* (1956), with the death of a widowed mother, the "farewell to . . . love" and "the vision at last" the

realization that "the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most . . .", is pivotal. The vision, or the record of it heard in later life, is a mocking echo to the aspirations of a younger Krapp and a permanent indictment of all he has failed to achieve, having relinquished in its favour "love", the girl in the punt, "the best years. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back."

Here, artistic "gain" is inseparable from personal loss. *Krapp's* "love" is neither the "desert of loneliness and recrimination that men call love" of *Proust*, nor the "banishment, with every now and then a postcard from home" of "First Love" (1945), nor the "mug's game" in my opinion and tiring on top of that, in the long run" of *Molloy* (1948), nor certainly the "two strangers uniting in the interests of torment" of *How It Is* (1961). The play's real gain, its real achievement, may well be the poignancy of its closing words as heard by the bitter and decrepit Krapp, the cadences in which his younger self catches a moment of quiet passion, a girl supine on the floor of a narrow canoe. Yet it is to some such "vision at last" as young Krapp describes (Ellmann calls it a revelation, as does Calder, whose book even furnishes us with a photograph of the jetté at Dun Laoghaire on a dark and stormy night like that on which it supposedly occurred) that we can date Beckett's entry into his true voice, his intuition that being "helpless", unknowable to himself – "a non-knower, a non-can-er" – and possessed by the sense of failure as a subtle guarantee of integrity, he could create the art proper to himself, an art of ignorance, impotence, non-knowing, non-being and non-doing.

From this conviction, and the abandonment of his first language, the language of Joyce (and "The more Joyce knew, the more he could"), all the prose fiction in French follows, its stylization that of impoverishment and defeat, its peculiar hold over us that of verbal richness and precision: Beckett's particular style from a despair. It gives us, as in *Murphy* and *Wait* only more (or less) so, stories of falling apart, of dispossession and weird displacement – compulsive struggles from A to B, obscurely enforced journeyings and returnings, wriggles in the mud; the loss of bicycles, umbrellas, crutches; the displacement of the self by stories, by the "Murphys, Molloyes and other Malones" of the novels, by words, speech – a vertiginous development of Rimbaud's "Je est un autre", or "the split self talking aloud", as Ben-Zvi succinctly says. It gives us, initially, *Mercier et Camier*, the *Nouvelles*, then *Molloy*, the first of Beckett's masterpieces (painstakingly and for the most part helpfully expounded by Michael Sheringham in his critical guide, *Beckett: "Molloy"*, forty-eight in the generally excellent Grant and Cutler series). A little later, it gives us the trenchant exchanges of the "pseudo-couple" Mercier and Camier transposed from a word-spinning narrator's head into dialogue to be spoken on a stage: that of Vladimir and Estragon in *En Attendant Godot* (or *Waiting for Godot*). This isn't the place to go into the relation between fiction

and plays, French and English, but someone ought to: Ben-Zvi acknowledges the original language of composition but discusses only the English version of each work, while for Sheringham only the French *Molloy* exists, and the question doesn't even arise for the contributors to *Beckett at 80*.

Immobility, to put it mildly, is the norm in the plays; dispossession too (no more carrots, bicycle-wheels, sugar-plums, painkillers, and so on). The rituals of a "corpsed" world are enacted with lunatic punctilio in a theatrical space which is also a "bone box"; rituals which turn out to be, as well, those of other theatrical styles: music-hall patter, vaudeville routine, grim pantomime farce, Greek or Racinian tragedy (as Charles R. Lyons points out in his essay "Happy Days and Dramatic Convention" in *Beckett at 80*). From such playing with forms of play much of the wit of Beckett's theatre derives. But the conventions have a way of turning inwards again, and we find we are watching and listening to something very close to home. Hence the plays' "power to claw", their ability to tap deep springs of terror or laughter in us.

"We're getting on", says Hamm in *Endgame*, and he means we (he and his audience) are getting, painfully perhaps, but with great resourcefulness, through the play, the evening. But he also means that he's getting on, the only way he knows how, with his parents, whom he has imprisoned in dustbins, and with Clov, whom he routinely tyrannizes. "Me . . . to play" are his opening words: in a game of chess, in a theatrical event, and in the psychodrama of his household. As head of it, he is both Lear and petulant child. There are other ways of getting on, as there are other ways of having got through life. "The eternal triangle" is one, and *Play* shows that triangle as, in effect, eternal. *Play's* three dead sinners are stuck in urns, reiterating *da capo* their bleakly hilarious, self-justifying recollections of novelistic mutual dealings. A piercing light probes and prompts them, either to trivial outrage, pleas for mercy, or the admission (which is really another self-justification, both irrelevant and terribly germane) that "all that" hellish business then, just like this hellish business now, was "just . . . play". (Quite so, for what is to be in a play? It is to be in an otherwise darkened place, with a light pointed at you, and be forced to speak.) Yet their pain was real enough, and it may be that the "some . . . truth" which remains unuttered is just that. Hell, we remember, is other people; in the closed, dark spaces of Beckett's later plays hell is the memory of them, and memory is torture by voices, or a voice. Known and unknown, from within. (Or is it from within? From *Krapp* onwards, and particularly in *Embers*, *That Time* and *Rockaby*, the ambiguous nature of tape-recorded speech – a very modern dramatic resource – itself contributes to dramatic tension. Two essays in *Beckett at 80*, "Beckett and the Act of Listening", by Bernard Beckerman, and "Beckett's Auditors: *Not I* to *Ohio Imprimatur*", by Katharine Worth, thoroughly investigate the haunted, haunting world, all echoes, shifting identity

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and dividedness – speaking/listening, self/other, past/present, dead/alive – that the late pieces create.)

The most direct and harrowing presentation of this afterlife of memory and desire is in the television play *Elm*. "Such love he got... God knows why... And look at him now... Throttling the dead in his head". While Joe suffers the guilt-edged lacerations of failed love, the eyes of the suicide, an ex-lover, remain unseen; the camera bears steadily in on Joe's eyes, staring out at us and back into the darkness behind themselves. "You know the one I mean, Joe... The green one... The narrow one... Always pale... The pale eyes... Spirit made light... To borrow your expression...". Those eyes connect backwards in time to Krapp's self-inflicted agony and forward to eyes we do see, in... *but the clouds*... (also written for television), in which, according to the directions, the close-up of a woman's face is reduced "as far as possible to eyes and mouth": the mouth utters inaudibly some phrases from Yeats.

Testy delirium
Or dull deceptitude,
Or what worse evil come –
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath –
Seen but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a hind's sleepy cry
Among the sleeping shades.

As Richard Ellmann points out, a great deal of Beckett's most recent writing can be inferred from those closing lines of "The Tower", but Beckett's and Yeats's moods could not be more different. Shades can deepen until they obscure the outlines of pain, or make it seem distant, muffled, unreal; other kinds of shades can deepen until they crowd out everything else. They can be longed for, but they seldom bring peace. Joe "throttling the dead in his head" is a version, which Ellmann does not mention, of Wilde's "Each man kills the thing he loves", the twist of the knife being that Joe has to go on killing it, throughout his solitary life and even – as that play and subsequent variations suggest – beyond death. "Stay where we were so long alone together, my shade will comfort you", Listener is exhorted in *Ohio Impromptu*, but shades bring, as often as comfort, a special torment.

This double-edged fidelity, a companionship *d'outré l'oubli*, is itself doubled in the emphasis on words themselves as alternately (or simultaneously) misery and relief. What can look like punishment by a pitiless Creator (which it is) is also punishment by a creator who extends pity to his sufferers. What are they being punished for? For being alive, or for having lived, "the original and eternal sin... of having been born", as Proust formulates it, and as a tiny four-line poem from the recent *Mirlouannes* recapitulates; but more than that, for having also failed to be born.

Mrs Rooney's story, in *All That Fall*, of the little girl whose trouble and early death, according to "one of these new head-doctors" (the head-doctor whom Beckett heard offer the diagnosis was C. G. Jung), were due to the fact that "she had never really been born", is the poignant crisis of that play – to which Dan's putative murder of a little boy is the brutal counterpoint, a throwaway gesture at the world's unspeakable cruelty. Nothing could be further from *All That Fall*'s unemphatic, sometimes knockabout, comedy than the mini-sequences *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, but these late works postulate much the same destination. They turn on solitary, half-mad old women (perhaps the infinitely older relatives of Mrs Rooney, to whom falls the honour of stating the paradigmatic Beckett case: "Don't mind me, I'm only talking to myself"), daughters who were "not there at all" in life and are, dead or approaching death, barely there now, whose isolation and compulsive behaviour, rocking, pacing, gabbling, "revolving it all in [their] poor minds", repeats what they give us to know of their mothers' lives, and quite possibly their mothers' before them. Woman hands on misery to woman; the Mouth of *Not I* tells her fragmentary story of a loveless, childless life, yet those writhing lips irresistibly suggest a vulva, and the words pouring from them, "stodily stream... like mud-bread", evince of monstrous progeny.

There are cloacal overtones, too (Keir Elam in his essay approaches these indecent matters with offensive coyness), beginning with the site – a lavatory – of Mouth's outpouring. We may recall Molloy's confusion as to the site of his birth ("through the arse if I remember rightly... first taste of the shit"), then the same confusion afflicting him over his one and only experience of love, "Perhaps after all she put me in her rectum. A matter of complete indifference to me, I needn't tell you." And yet: "But is it true love, in the rectum?" Agonizing uncertainty, exacerbated by Molloy's still further confusion between the image of his ancient lover Ruth or Edith, that of *louché* Louise ("one and the same old hag, flattened and crazed by life") and, "God forgive me", that of his mother, the mother towards whom

St John the Baptist" and the "Head of Medusa" – behind *Not I*, and suggests that "in one aspect the Auditor looks like a surrogate for the artist". A less ambivalent surrogate, perhaps, in the "St John", observers look on helplessly, but "one observer has made the picture, given us a unique understanding of the experience". Yet the "moral ambivalence of the artist's role" here is not in having created, or being, Auditor, but in having also created Mouth – and certainly, as Worth points out, that awareness informs *Catastrophe*, the 1982 play which has a "Director" and his assistant collaborating in the creation of a human catastrophe, the perfecting of a non-person.

The play deals with the artist's designs on his human material, with the painful exactions of the theatre (and anyone who doubts how pain-

honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again.

It isn't possible to look at *Godot*, *Endgame*, *Molloy*, *How It Is* or the rest in quite the same light after reading the broadcast – though it seems if anything more perfectly appropriate that, while the part played by Beckett in the Resistance during the war and occupation has long been known, the only direct reference in his *oeuvre* to that wartime experience should be the poem "St-Lô". It is quoted here in its entirety (the Vire is the river on which the town stands – or, in 1946, had stood):

Vire will wind in other shadows
Unborn though the bright ways tremble
And the old mind ghost-forsaken
Sink into its havoc

In both fiction and plays, harsh denial or refusal of the human world is unremitting, the grotesque failure of human relations almost unrelieved; yet everywhere in them we feel the pull of human needs, desires, affections. Feelings quicken, too, towards the inanimate world, stones, stars, mountain, plain and sea, the undulation of country roads, an unmistakably Irish land and seascape; and, while a spasmodic, motiveless violence or a systematized master – slave sadism is the usual currency of exchange, there is too an occasional moment of exquisite if bizarre tenderness, often connected with fathers and small children (though seldom, after *Murphy's* Celia and before *Ill Seen Ill Said*, with women). Rather than merely another symptom of Beckett's undoubtedly difficult relations with his mother (and the biography suggests that there have been symptoms enough) or of a congenitally depressive disposition, might all this not be seen as one response – at the very least, an honourable one – to not just the occupation but the persecution and annihilation, the pointless suffering, routine torture and debasement of millions?

On these terms the surprising thing is not the remorselessness of the writing but its beauty, inventiveness, discipline and care: not that it should be instinct with the belief that "to be an artist is to fail as no other dare fail" but that it should have come at all, and with such strange authority. Other writers have continued to sustain, in novels and plays, a more or less coherent imaginative world, positing more or less intelligible motives for the lives and actions of people. Beckett has simply preferred to delimit (as his early protagonist Belacqua puts it, long before the experience of St-Lô) "the insane areas of silence" in those same lives; to renounce, like the painter Bram Van Velde, "the malady of wanting to know what to do and the malady of wanting to be able to do it" and write out of "fidelity to failure", to "the mess".

To some of his audience, of course, this has involved an actual impoverishment, a reduction rather than an expansion of vision and expressive possibilities, a wilful paring amounting to self-mutilation. Others see the whole question differently. John Calder's *Festschrift* essay postulates behind Beckett's aesthetic of failure an ethic of co-operation and kindness, a lofty turning away from the values of a society "dominated by the advertising and public relations industries". His essay is called "Embarrassing Mr Beckett" and embarrassing it is, at least where it makes Beckett sound like a comfort-blanket for disappointed dropouts. (The whole volume, riddled with solecisms and misprints, including a reference to "The paradox of the Cretin", thrown together by an editor who prefers to remain anonymous, is embarrassing in one sense: Beckett deserved better than this for his eightieth birthday.) One doubts that Beckett is all that bothered by advertising or public relations. And yet, for all his clumsy and faltering sentences, one knows what Calder means. Dr Siegfried Unseld, Calder's German counterpart, puts it more succinctly: "His concern is his work, his care is directed towards others." And Barney Rosset, the American counterpart of both, tells an unforgettable anecdote about Beckett on his one trip to the United States, to New York, to (tip to the filming of *Filmi*). He stayed with Rosset, who writes: "After oversleeping on the day of [his] departure, I woke to find him calmly sitting with his overcoat on waiting for me. With both the uncompromisingness of the work and the gentleness of that image in mind, it might well be time for his admirers to be quiet.

Working on the monuments

John Sutherland

EDGAR HARDEN
Thackeray's "English Humourists" and "Four Georges"
228pp. Associated University Presses. £24.50.
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Edgar Harden has established himself as the most resolute of modern defenders of Thackeray the literary artist, joining ranks with Gordon Ray, the biographical defender of Thackeray the man. In *The Emergence of Thackeray's Serial Fiction* (1979) Harden argued for (demonstrated, he might claim) the careful coherence of Thackeray's narrative, traditionally misapprehended as casual and artless. In this latest book he vindicates the lectures on the eighteenth century, contradicting the received opinion that they are mere aberrations of Victorian prejudice and, as Charles Whibley put it, "the worst blot on Thackeray's literary reputation".

Harden is nothing if not intrepid. Thackeray's two expeditions on the lecturing circuit earned him £9,500 – more than all his previous novels together and the easiest money he claimed that he ever came by. But despite their box office successes in Britain and America, the lectures did not please Thackeray's more discriminating contemporaries. His reliance on imagination rather than research to re-create a waxy hologram of "the man" ("dear kindly old noxious Harry Fielding") was felt by historians to be lacking in scholarly rigour. "Would we have liked to live with him?" is the opening question in the opening lecture, on Swift. (Shakespeare yes, Swift no, is the unsurprising answer.) Carlyle observed sourly "that the best of greatness in a man is not whether we would like to meet him at a tea party". Macaulay detected a "superficial" acquaintance with the subject despite the overwhelming knowingsness of Thackeray's platform manner. Privately, Thackeray himself had his doubts about the

worth of his lectures beyond their immediate earning utility. He was evidently reluctant to see them in print, holding back *The Four Georges* some five years before publication in book form. Nor have they ever been easily available to the general reader.

Thackeray's views on the previous century's Hanoverian monarchs and humourists are not so much contradicted by successive commentators as totally ignored. It is quite typical, for instance, that Christopher Hibbert's 1975 biography of George IV does not mention Thackeray once. No modern study of Augustan literature uses Thackeray except as a classic illustration of his age's pathological sentimentalism and its slipshod scholarship. But however dubious his criticism, Thackeray's lectures were supremely successful as propaganda and have survived even to the present day as a kind of folk wisdom. Most effectively, he consolidated a general prejudice against Swift which Denis Donoghue plausibly suggests cast the author into unfashionability for eighty years, there to join those other Victorian rejects, Donne and Blake. Similarly Thackeray's detection of an impure moral "taint" in Sterne can be found resurfacing in Leavis's famous exclusion of the novelist from his Great Tradition. (That Thackeray in turn should have been excluded for frivolity is only fair.)

Modern commentary on the lectures has been cursory. Tilloston and Hawes's *Critical Heritage* volume does not rate them worth an entry. Where they are discussed emphasis is laid on their tactical relevance. In the *Humourists*, Thackeray's disparagement of cynical, clever writers like Swift and Sterne, together with his championing of lesser but "good hearted" men like Steele and Goldsmith, sets a public seal on his own recent "change of heart". The tests he applies to his six subjects all elevate personal worth over intelligence. Were they kind to children and caring of their parents? Were they chivalrous in love? And, that most Victorian of criteria, would we have liked to be their servants? Thackeray's broad-

side attack on the royal Georges, particularly his blackest beast, the fourth, certifies the "silent revolution" which his age felt they had achieved over the dissolute old régime that preceded them. As such, it stands as one of the most pompous monuments of self-congratulation the Victorians raised to themselves.

It wasn't merely English Victorians who were stroked by Thackeray's lectures. *The Four Georges* was initially conceived for American audiences, who responded ecstatically to his caricatures of what one New York paper called "the royal brutes" who had done their worst to keep the New World in colonial chains. In the British Isles, Thackeray had his greatest success in Scotland, which in the 1860s still retained a folk hatred for the Hanoverian butchers of 1745. Edmund Yates's contemporary allegation that Thackeray had been prepared to sell his country's reputation abroad for money was ill-mannered but not entirely baseless.

Harden's line of approach is, on the face of it, rather devious. He gives a brief account of why it was Thackeray should have decided in the early 1850s and 1860s to undertake the business of lecture tours (he was not a born lecturer, and unlike Dickens felt no urgent need to confront his audience in person). Equally scant is Harden's account of the delivery and reception of the lectures, an interesting subject but not one that particularly interests him. Although he has expertly mastered the diverse and scattered manuscript materials (there are as many as four drafts of some lectures) Harden is not directly concerned to give a detailed history of composition. He does not go into the place of the lectures in the long Victorian quarrel with the eighteenth century. (Macaulay's permeating influence, for instance, is ignored.)

Instead, Harden sets out to vindicate the works by going through them, paragraph by paragraph, rubbing the recalcitrant reader's nose in their vivacity, unity and clever comic strategies. Harden concludes: "The lectures

remain what they have always been: compelling personal visions mediated to their audiences in an English prose unsurpassed in Victorian England. For me, it is a prose not merely unsurpassed but unequalled by anyone else of his time." Forget the factual wrongness, forget the wrong-headedness, feel the quality of the language. In this way, Harden peddles the lectures as masterpieces of Thackerayan rhetoric. It's an ingenious but strangely Victorian line of argument.

In itself, Harden's seems a rather quixotic attempt to revive interest in works about which the general reader will probably remain profoundly indifferent. But in its method and general aims, like its predecessor, the book is part of a long-term co-ordinated programme to raise Thackeray studies and to equip them with the apparatus that modern scholarship demands. With this in mind, it's appropriate to go on to ask what kind of shape Harden's field is in. Terrible, is the straight answer. The Thackerayan has less reliable apparatus at his disposal than any comparable Victorianist. This is the more odd, since the Thackeray critical industry got a head start over its rivals in the post-war period. Gordon Ray's four-volume *Collected Letters and Private Papers* appeared in 1945–6, some ten years before the completion of Haight's eight-volume edition of Eliot's letters, twenty years before the *Pilgrim Edition* of Dickens's correspondence and thirty-five years before Millgate's edition of Hardy's letters got off the ground. Ray's edition of the *Letters* (like his subsequent two-volume *Life* of Thackeray) are landmarks of modern Victorian scholarship. But even in 1946, Ray noted that he had missed many items (mainly in Britain) and promised a supplementary volume shortly. In the second volume of his biography (1955) he reckoned there were now a thousand or so Thackeray letters which had eluded his edition. Again supplementary volumes were promised imminently. This supplementation is still awaited, forty years on. And given the general increase in scholarly knowledge and

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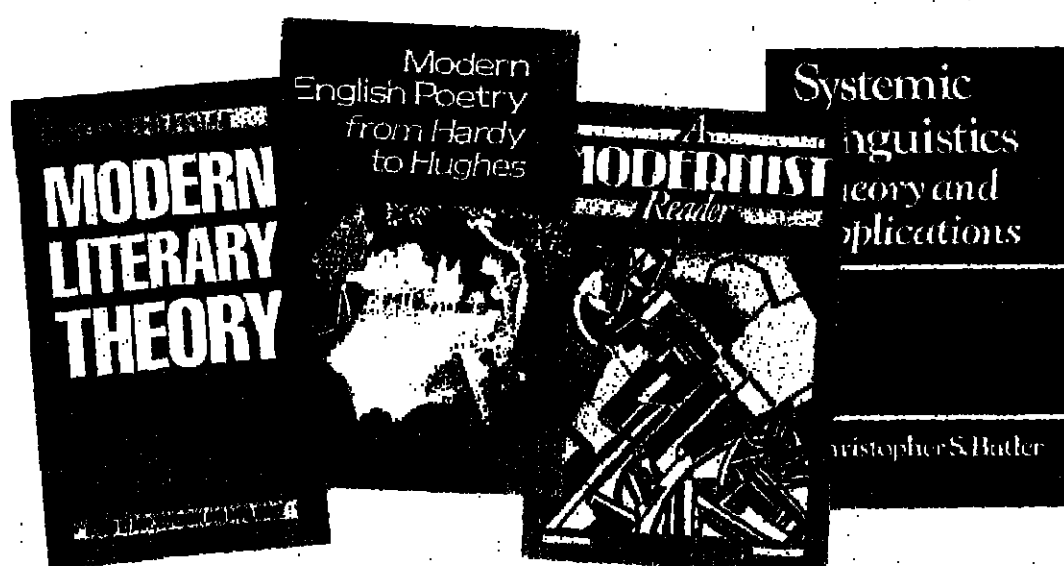
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217pp. University of California Press. £26.95.
0 520 05048 7

In the time of Constantine the Great, a young Egyptian, whose Coptic name Pakhome was Hellenized into Pachomius, was conscripted into the army and befriended by a Christian community, which he joined. This peasant soldier made history. (Customs still observed in Oxford and Cambridge colleges ultimately go back to his rulings.) He created a fellowship, or *koinonia*, of Coptic monastic communities, mainly grouped near the loop of the Nile by Dendera but soon extending into the Delta to include Greeks. A monk gets his name from being a loner. But Christianity had not merely been about what a man does with his solitariness. High on its agenda is the community of reconciliation within which the individual may discover liberation and much else besides. Pachomius first saw that while it might be a heroic thing to be a hermit in a hyena's den, weaker brothers and sisters needed organized communities. He gave them direction, stability and above all an enclosure wall. Large numbers were attracted, probably in part for economic reasons, since the monasteries were rural co-operatives. He divided the inmates into "houses" with housemasters to see to good conduct and attendance at corporate worship. The monasteries were not idyllic.

Pachomius exercised an overall control over his communities partly by an annual chapter for checking the accounts, partly by personal letters to his archimandrites. For these letters he used a strange code, not yet deciphered, based on the alphabet. Philip Rousseau's new study, *Pachomius: The making of a community in fourth-century Egypt*, makes negligible use of these letters, which are indeed oracular stuff, but an archimandrite who was informed of alarming reports about zeta in his monastery would probably guess what was intended. Perhaps the cipher will never be broken because its intention was not to communicate clearly, but by its very obscurity to surround the writer with an aura of mysterious authority. Yet any such suggestion would be difficult for Rousseau to stomach.

The central problem of all studies of Pachomius, and this one can be no exception, is to disentangle the Pachomius of history from that of the community tradition as it was later developed. Fifty years after the founder's death (on May 9, 346), his order not only was established in the Nile valley, but, through its Greek communities in the Delta, supplied Jerome with the *Rules* to translate into Latin. At about the same period, a Greek monk in the Delta wrote the founder's Life, the *Vita Prima* and parent of many subsequent biographies. The *Vita Prima* is also the story of the order's survival of a high crisis of leadership and purpose occurring after the founder's death. No one can read the *Vita Prima* without acknowledging that it must contain good historical information. The author drew on a native Coptic biographical tradition, much of it probably oral. Modern scholars have engaged in valiant joustings about the relative value of Greek and Coptic biographies, as also of traditions preserved in Arabic Lives, some of which are colourful but some with matter no one would set aside. Wise historians now treat everything we have with a cautious respect.

This is Rousseau's approach. His new book is characteristic of his art, with masterful control of the sources and sympathy for the subject. The thunderbolts in his footnotes are hurled with accuracy and are so courteous that they might almost be mistaken at times for a shower of gold. His achievement is to apply reasonably objective criteria for the recovery of the Pachomius of history. The documents of 400 AD describe elaborate and strict regulation, and this has led many to portray Pachomius as a religious drill-sergeant, only without that touch of humanity that sergeants are famous for. Rousseau's Pachomius might not be a person with whom to spend an urbane evening. But his ideal was anything but a community under military obedience; he did not enforce inhuman austerity with public rebukes before the entire community, confinements to cells, imposed fasts of the utmost severity, or bloody flagellations. The grim tyrant who appears in some textbooks too uncritical of Gibbon turns out to be the very soul of moderation and good sense, with a practical eye to the relation between the body and the inner life. He did not start his communities with a rigid book of regulations. The rules grew gradually as questions arose. If a trivial rule against talking in the bakery was broken, Pachomius could become



A house in modern Sinasos: reproduced from Sinasos in Cappadocia (16pp. *Agia Publications*; available from the National Trust for Greece, 31 Southampton Row, London WC1B 3HW. £15), which includes a chapter by Lyn Rodley, "The Byzantine Cave Churches and Monasteries of Cappadocia".

Candle-lit common-rooms

Anthony Bryer

LYN RODLEY
Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia
266pp. Cambridge University Press. £45.
0 521 26798 6

Lyn Rodley reckons that there may be more than 600 Byzantine churches cut out of the volcanic rock-cones of Cappadocia. What is certain is that there are still plenty to explore. Since 1912 scholars have concentrated on their bold and fresh wall-paintings. The earliest dated church comes after 913, with some hermitages before, but the great burst is in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. This coincides with a major period of Byzantine art and patronage elsewhere, from which Cappadocia stands curiously remote. One reason is that these churches are blessed with no written history. Even the First Crusaders, who could have answered some of Dr Rodley's questions, had other things on their minds when they passed in 1097. Virtually all the evidence is visible to all.

Today what the travel brochures call its "fairy chimneys" make Cappadocia well trumped by tourists to Turkey. Most are not Byzantine, art historians, and so ask the obvious question: what is all this borrowing and decorating in the rock doing here? It is the shining virtue of Rodley's book that she tackles this question and, in looking for fresh evidence of function, records cave complexes often overlooked among the painted churches. Compared with earlier accounts, her plans must endure despite the eroding landscape. They

are not, as she calls one, "very approximate indeed", but quite approximate enough. This is impressive work.

Her answer is sometimes muffled through the thesis origins of the work, and happily raises more problems than can be solved. There was no great cult centre and the local saint, Hieron, was not much painted, so what brought monks and patrons here? Perhaps clues lie in a closer look at pilgrims' graffiti. But Rodley is surely right in proposing the familiar sequence of a holy man who gathered disciples, a rudimentary community which might survive him; then a lay patron seeking commemoration and burial in a regulated family monastery-chantry. A closer look, again, at contemporary Byzantine monastic charters elsewhere would have illustrated these two types.

Instead, the pragmatic Rodley divides her foundations by shape: eleven "courtyard" monasteries (which boast kitchens but no refectory, save for one which has a refectory but no kitchen); and a number of "refectory" monasteries (which have refectories seating up to forty, but no kitchen). Such paradoxes are endemic to Cappadocia and one misses other marks of a Byzantine monastery: cells, to start with - did they really sleep in dormitories?

To the two "monastic" groups, Rodley adds some intriguing hermitages and the enigmatic caves of Agik Saray, where the chapels are minor but there are thirty-seven mangers. She suggests that the complex was some sort of summer palace. I suggest the site of an annual fair, on the lines of the nearby Seljuk one of Yabanku at Pazargören, but that too needs special pleading.

Donors' inscriptions should be a key, but invite further special pleading. Monasteries are named twice, but neither time in a monastery. The patrons are minor officials and gentry; but tufa is so easy to cut that it may have encouraged donors on the cheap. The patrons of Tokali Kilise, the grandest church of all, had no titles at all. One would like to know more about their secular interests and it is high time that the "Aesopian" wall-paintings and inscriptions at Eski Gümtüç were published.

Rodley argues a brief eleventh-century career for most of these monasteries, ascribing their apparent abandonment (one in mid-excavation) to the threat posed by the Seljuks, victors at Mantzikert in 1071. She even dates one complex by this terminus, around when Byzantine civil officialdom certainly left the area. One argument is the absence of candle soot (this is not lamp country) in these dark churches, but until someone applies carbon-14 dating to it, the evidence is patchy: Eski Gümtüç is pretty greasy. Pontic churches are rather clean, while medieval Cypriots seem to have been very dirty worshippers. Further discussion of liturgy and of how these churches were used would have helped.

More important is that the Seljuks were not actually the threat here: they did not take nearby Kayseri until 1168. It was the Turkomans who first appeared in the area in 1067 and the Danishmendids who more or less controlled it for a century thereafter, building Kayseri's Ulu Camii in 1135. Local Byzantines should not have been much bothered. They lost a state but kept their faith and economy. Cappadocian villages such as Ürgüp and Sinasos grew Christian vines, for Turkoman sheep

excited; but he would give pastoral reasons for the rule.

Rousseau takes issue, therefore, with great names (A. H. M. Jones and A. J. Festugière and others), for whom Pachomius was a banner of culture, haunted by hell-fire and demonology, a tyrant exploiting unemployed fellahin, a ruthless, petty-minded governor of men and systems. Rousseau's Pachomius is a profound spiritual director, enabling his monks to come to repentance via an accurate perception of self. Far from keeping all power in his own hands, he encouraged the sharing of responsibility.

Rousseau is skilful in making concessions, which are indeed forced upon him by the basic texts. After all, the *Vita Prima* makes a substantial place for the founder's fear of torment hereafter, an awareness which gave him a constantly lugubrious expression; and the biographer contrasts him with his later successor, Theodore, whose ways were pervaded by joy. The master's spiritual life allowed a major part to visions of angels and demons, to an extent which brought upon him strong criticism from bishops in a council held at Latopolis in 345. It has to be added that Rousseau might have been wise to mention a fact which at least *prima facie* qualifies his picture of a gentle encourager of individual growth and autonomy, namely the enclosure wall. Pachomius was the first person to surround his ascetic community with a high wall, creating a kind of *temenos* for sacred studies and prayer, but also carrying considerable juridical and disciplinary implications. To be sent outside the wall was a formidable penalty. A monk impenitently guilty of serious offences (such as homosexual practices) would know that for him there would be no request, and the brothers would chant no psalms as they conducted his corpse to the cemetery but would proceed in a terrifying silence.

Pachomius has the additional interest of dealing with a classic instance of biographical and other material originally compiled from oral tradition, with all the fascination and uncertainty that this brings to the interpretation of the story. And Philip Rousseau's is distinctive among books on this subject by having so little to say about the canny and saintly Theodore, whose extraordinary relationship to Pachomius dominates the earliest Greek Life, and without whose dramatic handling of the crisis after 346 the religious purpose of the order might have become secondary to the economic and social.

Their churches were neither defended nor desecrated. The Patriarch of Constantinople was still vigorously carpeting Cappadocian bishops (Danishmendid subjects) in 1143, while over a century later Nicean and Palaiologan emperors were still being commemorated in new cave churches. I suspect that widespread local conversion to a kind of Islam may date from the thirteenth century, with the seductive and syncretistic message of the Hadji Bektash. There are independent traditions that his preaching encompassed the Christians of Sinasos and Ürgüp; his Cappadocian tomb is a dervish shrine. Maybe the Hadji Bektash's sort of monasticism owed as much (or as little) to Rodley's shadowy communities as they had in turn inherited from his predecessor in the same preaching-grounds, St Basil.

But Rodley may eventually be proved right in arguing that her makeshift monasteries died abruptly two centuries before they needed to have done. The experience elsewhere is that chantries rarely survive the patronage of the founders, and Byzantine monasteries, especially, the loss of their economic base - howsoever modest. We know nothing of Cappadocian endowments, but something about what happens when local patrons, who owe their status to minor imperial office, recede with the Byzantine state. Boilas, one such easterner, had already gone west by 1059. A parallel comes after 1191, when Byzantine government officials and patrons abandoned Cyprus to the natives.

Lyn Rodley has opened such questions to all visitors to Cappadocia. They should now pack this sensible book along with some very sensible shoes.

A natural transcendence

D. Z. Phillips

FERGUS KERR
Theology after Wittgenstein
202pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £22.50.
0 19 14688 1
JOSEPH RUNZO
Reason, Relativism and God
200pp. Macmillan. £27.50.
0 333 37024 4

Theology and conceptual analysis have not had much to say to one another. Fergus Kerr and Joseph Runzo differ in what they think can come about through closer collaboration. Kerr thinks students of theology have much to gain from the later philosophy of Wittgenstein. Runzo thinks the absolute demands of religious faith are enriched by appropriating the insights of conceptual relativism, "the view that truth is relative to societal schemes".

Wittgenstein, Kerr argues, can rescue contemporary theology from Cartesianism. This theology's conception of the self is of an autonomous, rational, dimensionless consciousness, said to be revealed when the inessential body, actions, desires, convictions and culture have been stripped away. Starting from this disengaged ego, epistemological endeavours

are made to justify its necessarily indirect acquaintance with the external world, other human beings and the reality of God. This human view of man and his neighbourhood leads to an inverted theology, in which the disengaged ego, rather than God, is the centre of the world; a theology found, in different ways, in the work of Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Don Cupitt, Schubert Ogden, Timothy O'Connell, Peter Chirico and Gordon Kaufman.

Runzo exposes theology's confused efforts to transcend the insights of conceptual relativism. Schleiermacher, Buber, William James and others try to do so by appealing to a basic religious experience; Tillich and Ogden by seeking to found religion on a correct metaphysics; Bultmann and Barth by appeal to an abiding *kerygma*. Runzo's resolution of the tension between faith's absolute demands and the unavoidable relativism of Christian conceptual categories is as follows: "It is true . . . within conceptual scheme C . . . that the demand to decision of the Christian faith is absolute".

Kerr and Runzo do not, however, welcome Wittgenstein's influence on the philosophy of religion without qualification. Kerr has believed foundationless rumours that those so influenced think of religion as a "form of life", understandable only from within and uncritically

cizable from without; Runzo thinks they deny that there are truth-claims in religion, and believe religion to be conceptually isolated. In fact, what is claimed is that to understand what a religious truth-claim amounts to, attention has to be paid to the grammar of the language in which it is made. Runzo admits that I have emphasized that "religion is not cut off from other modes of social life", but, curiously, thinks this emphasis is rendered vacuous by my insistence that "forms of life . . . do not point beyond themselves to a mystery which they disclose". The point is rather that it is only within the form of life that we grasp what talk of mystery in this context amounts to.

In response to my claim that we can decide whether two people are worshipping the same God by looking to the kind of religious ideas which play a role in their lives, Runzo says, "But to say that one worships the same God as someone else is not just to claim to be in the same religious tradition, but additionally to purport to refer to the *same entity* or to be confronted by it". Runzo misses the grammatical point of my observation. When we examine the grammar of "same" in the "the same God", my claim is that it differs from the grammar of "the same object" or "the same entity". No amount of philosophy by *italics* renders these grammatical investigations superfluous.

On these matters, Kerr is extremely clear-headed. Students of theology are well placed to benefit from Wittgenstein if they are prepared to turn from their metaphysical assumptions to reflect on the natural surroundings we share with one another. We must think non-metaphysically about our natural religious surroundings too. We kneel; we praise; we worship. This behaviour does not depend on existential presuppositions about an entity called "God", externally related to it. It is in the context of this behaviour that "divine reality", "communion with God", "seeing the world as God's", "deciding whether two people are worshipping the same God", have their sense.

There are times, however, when Kerr claims too easy a victory. He exposes the confusions of Cartesianism in his discussions of solipsism, pain and the private-language argument. No doubt some forms of individualism depend on these confusions. But are there not unconfused forms of individualism? Kerr is too ready to assume that the shared character of human life leads to agreement in moral reactions, for example, about the status of embryos. There are even hints that conceptual conclusions in the philosophy of mind have positive political implications. Generally, Kerr does not give enough attention to what separates and distances people. Atheism, as well as belief, has to be taken seriously.

Runzo, on the other hand, aware of what separates people, seeks to combine his conceptual relativism with Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal reality. By doing so, conceptual frameworks which compete for people's allegiance become, for him, claims about a reality which is independent of them. But this concept of "independence" is entirely unmediated. It flounders in a metaphysical no-man's land. As a result, for Runzo, "The risk of faith is that our human truth-claims do not correctly refer to the noumenal God; the commitment of faith includes the trust that they do". Is this an analysis of what it means to say that in God one lives, and moves, and has one's being?

It has been assumed, since the Enlightenment, that to see religion as part of the natural history of mankind is to expose it as an illusion. Kerr shows how failing so to regard religion ignores the rich ways in which it informs human life. The only worthwhile theology is a naturalized theology, one in which the meanings of religious concepts are mediated in the detail of our everyday lives. Ironically, it is Runzo's failure to take conceptual relativism seriously enough which, in the end, prevents his appreciating such a theology. Only a naturalized theology can show the sense in which a transcendent God can be said to be truly with us.

THE TIMES



Pulling the youth vote

Next week: From Harold Wilson's honours for the Beatles to Mrs Thatcher's knighthood for Bob Geldof, politicians have increasingly recognized the importance of the young voter. *The Times* looks at the role of the youth strategists of all parties who are attempting to break through the apparent apathy of the 6.5 million voters under 25

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John Butt

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA
The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta
310pp. Faber, £9.95.
0371 145795

This fine novel caused controversy in left-wing Hispanic circles, where the author, whose politics descend from a line including Canus, Isaiah Berlin, Popper and Orwell, is regularly excoriated as a CIA lackey. It tells the story of a farcical twelve-hour "revolution" staged in 1958 in the Peruvian Andes by a handful of muddled Trotskyites. Specifically, it traces the life of Mario Vargas Llosa's old schoolmate, Alejandro Mayta, a visionary homosexual who stakes everything on a chance for political action, and becomes the unwitting and forgotten precursor of Fidel, Che and "Shining Path". As we might expect from Vargas Llosa, the novel is, on one level – perhaps not the most important – a satirical account, witty and compassionate, of the faithless, even enviable gift for self-delusion of the far Left. (For more on the novel as political analysis see the *TLS*, March 8, 1985, where the original edition was reviewed.)

But it is much more than a "political" novel. Vargas Llosa sees himself as a defender of literature against politics, and the main theme of this book is in fact the claims of social and historical fact on the writer of fiction: it is an acutely self-conscious and sophisticated inquiry into the nature and limits of literary realism.

Street rites

Ian Thomson

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI
The Ragazzi
Translated by Emile Capouya
256pp. Carcanet, £9.95.
085635 005U

The Ragazzi, first published in Italian in 1955 (and reviewed in the *TLS* on August 5, 1955), now reissued for the first time in English, is not a novel in the strict sense of the word. It is made up of a series of fast-moving cinematic vignettes of the Roman underworld. One Italian critic called the book "una colonna sonora", or sound track. And in fact much of the street violence in the *Ragazzi* was later to find fuller expression in Pasolini's studies of the fierce rites and rituals of classical myth in films like *Medea* and *Oedipus Rex*. The book is an account of the adventures, from the last days of the German occupation of Rome to the beginning of the 1950s, of a group of "ragazzi" who live – or subsist – in the Roman slums. They while away the days stealing from the blind and helpless, thieving scrap metal from building sites, and prostituting themselves to homosexuals: anything for money, which is

Testing woman

Judith Davies

LAILA KEZICH
Composition with Dark Centre
Translated by John Galt
165pp. Olive Press, £7.95 (paperback, £4.95).
0946889 104

The everyday, domestic existences of women from girlhood to old age may seem less than compelling material, but no one should make the mistake of calling these stories "exquisite miniatures". They release far too much pain for that. In many of the thirteen stories now available in English (*Gruppo concentrico* was reviewed in the *TLS*, November 29, 1985) Laila Kezich is a powerful recaptor of the vague apprehensions of childhood, and of the rules that operate in children's play. In "Playing Games", a little girl stands shrouded and alone on a stool, reluctantly impersonating a ghost. The sudden terror that overtakes her is as convincingly done as the bewilderment of Linda,

ism. The intensely political theme reads like a kind of self-inflicted challenge, as though the author were showing us that he is enough of a virtuoso to transmute even the driest topic known to man, Trotskyite infighting, into compelling literature. He does this by putting himself in his book as a partly fictionalized character, and letting us in on how he works up his own material. He takes us backstage on a round of interviews with the more or less mendacious, partly imaginary "eyewitnesses" to Mayta's life, and then has the effrontery to show in detail how he ignores or embroiders the facts thus collected for the sake of a vivid fiction.

Everything in the book conspires initially to establish "Alejandro Mayta" as a real figure of Peruvian history known personally to the author, and the fictional status of the writing is thus not at all clear until the end when "Vargas Llosa" finally tracks down the "real" Mayta, who turns out to have been neither the author's schoolfriend nor a homosexual and never even to have been married to the eyewitness "Ade-laide" – whose harrowing account of their tragic union we have just read . . . What seemed like a straightforward dramatization of an event of rather obvious political meaning is deftly turned on itself and shown up as problematically imaginary: just as the Peru of most of the novel is an apocalyptic (but plausible) fantasy, so the real nature of the obscure escapee of 1958 – which has a factual basis – remains elusive.

All this must have taken extraordinary artistic nerve, and Vargas Llosa's effortless control over such emotionally charged material should

"the source of all pleasures, all satisfaction in this cockeyed world". Ricetto, the main character in the large cast of crooks and racketeers, is a typical Pasolini hero. A brutal thug who will resort to any ruse to survive, he is at the same time a potential martyr: at the beginning of *The Ragazzi* we see him braving the swift current of the Tiber to save a drowning swallow. At the end he does the same for a young boy, but fails to rescue him from drowning. Oddly, there is little tragedy in the novel: Pasolini, at heart a romantic, practised a rather diluted catholicism; he always saw death as a way to spiritual redemption.

Pasolini wrote *The Ragazzi* in Roman dialect to remind Italian literature of a language which it had largely ignored: it was part of his life-long polemic against what he called "la lingua dei padroni". Emile Capouya's translation of this rich and inventive speech into streetwise American ("jerk", "shitass", "punk", "you can all go screw") works badly when inserted between Pasolini's lyrical descriptions of Rome, and the names of some of the thugs ("Wise Guy", "Fats", "Rats") are more Damon Runyon than *romanaccio*. Otherwise the translator has handled to the best of his ability a book which does not lend itself very easily to translation.

be enough to recommend this brilliant novel to the most apolitical reader. Anglophones may be further comforted that the translation robs them of little, although admittedly the Spanish of the original is neither particularly highly-wrought nor especially colloquial: Vargas Llosa now practises Orwellian plain talk in an international Castilian mostly shorn of regionalisms. The structure of the dialogue is subtle, however, and he mischievously exploits the ambiguities of the Spanish verb system so as to obscure the identity of the speaker. The American translator, inexplicably and infuriatingly anonymous (what future for the art when translators won't be named?) handles these problems well. But she/he mishandles

The dying out of Dodo

Robert Wells

ALBERTO MORAVIA
The Voyeur
Translated by Tim Parks
186pp. Secker and Warburg, £9.95.
0436287218

A recent magazine interview of Claudia Cardinale by Alberto Moravia consisted entirely of questions about her body. She entered into this seemingly reductive game with enthusiasm, and the result was a surprisingly full sense of her character as well as of Moravia's. Customary decencies were observed in the interview as they are not in Moravia's new novel, but *The Voyeur* too reflects an apparent belief that people have no existence apart from the situation they are in, and that the first fact of that situation is the body. Moravia indicates his characters by a twitch of the nostrils, fleshy fingertips, even by the disposition of pubic hair; and shows them drawn together – along with himself and his reader – in the calculating complicity of voyeur and exhibitionist.

Edoardo, the narrator, is a survivor of the generation of 1968. He belonged, as he repeats somewhat rhetorically, to "the protest movement", but is now, peaceably enough, a university lecturer. He describes himself as "an intellectual, an animal that's dying out", and his nickname appropriately is Dodo. Two connected obsessions dominate his life: the exercise of a strong visual sense (events are related almost entirely in the present tense) and compulsive thoughts about nuclear war. The novel's Italian title is *L'uomo che guarda*; the intellectual is revealed as the man who sees and

From a small scrap

Andrew Graham-Yooll

EDUARDO QUIROGA
On Foreign Ground
92pp. Deutsch, £7.95.
0233978941

By December 1983 the Falklands/Malvinas conflict of 1982 had spawned thirty-one non-fiction volumes of various kinds in Argentina, and forty-nine non-fiction titles in Britain, plus one novel. For a small scrap over useless rocks, a few thousand sheep and 1,400 Victorian peasants, that bibliography is impressive. Yet the books revealed only a little about the mentality behind the conflict. This novel by Eduardo Quiroga – an Argentine who worked in London and now lives in Paris – is probably only the second volume of fiction (the other being *Exocer*, by Jack Higgins) to come out of the war.

The foreign ground of the title is the islands, in which the author's principal character, an Argentine soldier, feels he has no business – nor, he thinks, do the British have any. The mentality behind the invasion is clarified in this moving and at times very good book (though there are too many bracketed asides for readers unfamiliar with Argentine, and some irritating misplacing of recent incidents).

The confusion of the war from the Argentine point of view is partly summed up early on:

the occasional obscenity, and by overdoing English slang accidentally ascribes years of sexual experience to Mayta's naive lover. Nor is the re-casting of the title *Historia de Mayta* as *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* without its consequences in view of the complexities described above. But these are quibbles: this novel must be read by all lovers of subtle fiction. It re-confirms Vargas Llosa as the greatest living Hispanic novelist, a marvellously inventive, intelligent and witty story-teller who is also the best kind of controversialist, gifted with a talent for gently problematizing, and thereby deepening and sharpening, the all-too-often simplistic cultural and political debates of his continent.

cannot understand. Understanding has been outdated by the Bomb.

Edoardo is baffled too by his domestic life. His refusal to own property means that he and his wife, Silvia, must live in the flat belonging to his father, a famous professor, whom he claims to detest as standing for everything that his own generation rebelled against. Silvia has friendly, but inexplicably, cleared out, and the action of the novel – such as it is – is mainly concerned with Edoardo's fumbling attempts to find out why and to get her back. This, it turns out, means untangling his feelings about his father and facing the likelihood that the "solemn commitments" by which he flatters himself he has lived are little more than personal resentments in a stalemate of sexual rivalry.

Though Moravia's characters express themselves chiefly through a series of erotic encounters, sex is valued rather as a kind of gluttony, an impersonal expression of vitality which succeeds, where the intellectual's understanding fails, in challenging the crushing anticipation of catastrophe. Edoardo discovers to his cost that his father, fighting old age, has known this all along. But he is also helped by the realization that his wife's betrayal of him makes her "all the more vital and free" in his eyes.

The deadpan directness of Moravia's sexual preoccupation reminds one of Auden's remark that "Italian men have to make sure you know they've got a penis", but *The Voyeur* is saved-dishastening and inconclusive fable though it is – by Moravia's dry, unironic intelligence. Tim Parks has produced a fluent and readable translation; the few awkwardnesses are not obstructive, but it might have been as well, here at least, not to describe a refrigerator as "spanking" new.

These people we are fighting are what stood for civilization . . . we were taught to dress, behave, play sports like Englishmen. Americans were imperialists, the French were lusty and dirty, the Italians and Spaniards [were] the necessary soil from which we sprang; but the English were civilized.

The novel, more like a short story, takes the form of a letter written between May and June 1982 by the soldier, in a trench outside Port Stanley, to his English girlfriend in Cambridge. (The novel was written in English.) The recollection of their time together is a love story. But the tale is a tragedy, or rather four tragedies.

There is the tragedy of personal loss, the tragedy of war, the tragedy of the soldier's family destroyed by the cruelty of the military in Argentina's government, and the tragedy of Argentina itself. The soldier's letter reveals the corruption and moral squalor of Argentine society, which acclaimed a dictator's return, a military régime, a football victory and an invasion with one voice; a society which only discovered human rights when individuals were directly affected by human wrongs, but otherwise ignored responsibility; a society catapulted into modernity having only a pedagogical acquaintance with its own history.

The long letter is never to be delivered, the predictability of the ending takes nothing from the atmosphere, however. The military government has gone, thank goodness; a democratic President is in office. But Argentine society is the same.

A slice of sovereign culture

Colin Greenland

CLIVE KING
The Sound of Propellers
206pp. Viking Kestrel, £6.95.
01670 811068

In the course of 1938–39, his first year at King's School, Rochester, the eleven-year-old hero of *The Sound of Propellers* manages more than his share of improbable exploits. He discovers a German spy, stows away on the long-distance record-breaking flight of an experimental seaplane, is captured by a band of outlaws, escapes a prowling tiger, gets his brother out of prison and flies back to England to win the cricket match against Framlingham and share a bowl of strawberries with Barbara, the rather special sister of his best chum Mouse. The difference between this latest novel from Clive King (author of the classic *Stig of the Dump*) and the traditional juvenile romance of Empire is decisive in redeeming it from being a quaint anachronism, a reheated muffin for the offspring of Young Fogeys. This resourceful eleven-year-old (or twelve, he can't be sure) is Murugan, an orphan from Madras, unprepared for the blithe, heartless, complacent austerity of Junior Boarding House, and significantly not much better integrated at the end of the book than he was at the beginning. ("He's a weed, sir! He's no good at anything.")

Racism is not the main issue. King is kind to

his characters, but probably accurate in presenting Murugan's contemporaries as inconsiderate rather than hostile. At first they giggle at the colour of his skin; thereafter they merely underestimate him because they don't understand him and won't try. For King's intended reader (who is perhaps a couple of years older than Murugan), this is a fairly shrewd and imaginatively useful introduction to the inhumanity of imperialism. Boarding-school, with its compulsory Christianity and its cadet corps, its insularity and its incomprehensible rituals, constitutes a chunky and unappetizing slice of the sovereign culture. Murugan is perfectly willing to ingest as much of it as he can.

Without any foreshortening not licensed by the genre, *The Sound of Propellers* is a study of Anglo-Indian relations at the outbreak of the Second World War. It is to India that the seaplane Mercury flies, with Murugan in a mail-bag; the outlaws who seize him and the pilot there are freedom fighters, and so is Murugan's brother Shanmugam, which is why he has been interned. The pilot, Harold, and the navigator, Reggie, are stock fictional types, full of cheery banter, but sympathetic to the plucky youngster who emerges from the mail to ask where he can relieve himself. King uses them, as he uses everything in this accomplished and admirable book, not only to entertain his reader but also to delineate the insensitivity of these lords of the Earth, jocularly obtuse about the lands and people under their wings. Murugan is a new breed, moving beyond their circumscription,

The monsters of imagination

J. K. L. Walker

GARRY KILWORTH
Witchwater Country
202pp. Bodley Head, £9.95.
0370 307909

The Witchwater Country of Garry Kilworth's novel is south-east Essex, that area of lonely farms, salt-flats and marsh lying between the Crouch and the Thames estuary. In 1952, the year in which the story is set, such country districts, the author reminds us, were in a period of transition between ancient discomforts and the consumer-durable society. Daily life without electricity or water means, for young Raymond Swan (known to his friends as "Titch"), living with his grandparents in their terraced village cottage, the pleasures of the coal-fired kitchen range and "The Man in Black" on the battery-powered wireless-set, but it also means an outside lavatory and the night-time terrors of a chilly bedroom where, once the candle is extinguished, the monsters of his imagination press in on him. Even in daylight when, released by the summer holidays, he roams the countryside with Oaky, Dinger and Milky, the other members of his gang, fantasy plays an important role – not merely in the elaborate war-games of Saxon and Norman which diversify the swimming, the scrumping, the fishing, but also in the frightening local belief in the water witches who inhabit the bottom of ponds and drag children down to destruction.

In his acknowledgements Garry Kilworth records his debt to M. R. James's short story "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, my Lad" and there is in fact a strong undertow of the supernatural running through *Witchwater Country*. It is kept at a distance, however, by the device of an adult narrator, introduced in a prologue to the story, who invites the reader to follow the adventures and emotional maturing of his eleven-year-old self; how, for instance, the fantasies were a necessary aspect of Titch's life at the time. Dully patronizing in prospect, the method in fact succeeds beautifully, wrapping the story in a mantle of gentle good sense and unshrill observation of the past. There are, in any case, as the tale unfolds, shocks enough. Oaky is drowned diving into the river from a gantry, following a dare by a malicious girl, Jackie, who has attached herself to the group. A half-crazed old man whom the boys encounter on the marshes where he is searching for the body of the fier Amy Johnson, drowned during the war in the Thames estuary, reappears in gruesome circumstances. A badger, that

Raymond has tamed is later discovered by him nailed to a post, cruelly cast in the role of victim's familiar by Jackie and Dinger. Death, malice and childhood fears hang sombrely over the novel; the shock, too, of dishonesty exposed in a hitherto idolized adult, as when Raymond's Uncle Dave hurries him away from a fire field he himself has caused.

There are, though, a hero and a heroine in the persons of Raymond's grandmother and grandfather. The old man, reserved and taciturn, ekes out a living as a carter and odd-job man. Handicapped by an artificial leg, he feeds his grandson's curiosity with a string of tall stories about how and where on some Great War battlefield he left his real leg behind. His

taking advantage of their ignorance, exploiting the imperial system and the education it has fed him to contrive his brother's release.

"Yes, India was my country, but people like Harold and Reggie had the best of it." Murugan's nonchalant political nous is indeed remarkable, though carefully simplified and naturalized in his love for his brother and their homeland. The principles of personal freedom and national independence appeal strongly to the capable young exile, yet he is obediently polite to authority and orthodoxy. When Barbara swears, it is Murugan who disapproves. When the District Postmaster comes to subject the crew of the crash-landed plane to infuriating bureaucratic rigmarole, it is Murugan who offers him a cup of coffee. Privately, he knows the coffee is disgusting: "but you had to be hospitable, didn't you? This was India."

The Sound of Propellers is also a funny book. King finds amusement in the Indian national character without, it seems to this reviewer, demeaning anyone. He invests Murugan with the dignity of the schoolboy hero, the integrity of the clever outsider, while colouring his cultural mishaps with the humour of innocent confusion. "They laughed. But people are always laughing at me." Murugan is not upset. His personality is buoyant; in any case, he often laughs at himself, and, justifiably, at us. "Tell an Englishman to sit and meditate for half an hour, and he'll fidget. But put a fishing rod in his hand and he'll happily do nothing for hours."

wife, immersed in the hard, necessary tasks of the rural housewife, seems the counterpoint of his solid presence, until a final twist reveals that she has maintained a life of her own outside the coils of married dutifulness. Her heroism, comments the adult narrator, in an epilogue, has been to remain with her husband. The disastrous East Coast floods of January 1953 bring the novel to a dramatic and satisfying conclusion, as we see that, in the Witchwater Country, underlying ancient superstition is the reality of death by water. Garry Kilworth reaches this end without strain, and the novel as a whole reflects a quiet and balanced judgment of people and place, expressed in simple, elegiac prose.

This business of remembering

Neil Philip

JANNI HOWKER
Isaac Campion
84pp. Julia MacRae, £5.95.
086203 2709

The soft-focus world of the Hovis advertisements is never more than a twist of a phrase away in Janni Howker's compact new novella. It is deliberately evoked, and just as deliberately challenged and undercut. Isaac Campion, narrating the crucial events of his turn-of-the-century childhood, assumes an audience that thinks cobbles romantic, regional accents quaint; an audience that believes in the "good old days". The cosy glow of nostalgia is doused to the chill of a cold dawn, a scraped breakfast, a day's work ahead.

The deliberate harshness of perspective makes this book in many ways an urban counterpart of Rachel Anderson's brilliant *The Pancher's Son* (1922). There is behind both books a weight of feeling which makes them at once works of fiction and acts of witness to truths which other fictions have disguised. In this second sense, *Isaac Campion* is a triumph. Its feel for period is utterly convincing; in the pattern of relationships in a family and a community, as much as in the small telling details which Janni Howker observes so sharply.

As a story, however, *Isaac Campion* never quite makes full use of this cunningly evoked atmosphere. The decision to tell the story as first-person reminiscence limits both what the narrative can imply and what it can show. There is strain when Howker needs to make explicit for her readership matters which her narrator would surely pass without comment,

Isaac the narrator is partly old man making urgent sense of his early memories, partly ruminative schoolteacher. One minute he is using "right broad speech", the next he is telling us, "This is the only way we have, you see, to go back into the past. This business of remembering. But it is false."

The limitation to one man's speech patterns, and the sense of violation when they are disrupted, is matched by the limitation to one point of view, which denies us, for instance, much sense of what is happening on the other side of Isaac's family's feud with the rival horse-copers the Lacey. We are left with Isaac as an old man observing himself as a boy observing fragments of one half of a story: excellent as far as it goes, but too narrow to chart fully the knot of tensions it describes.

The result of all this is to confine the book to over-familiar ground: the sensitive lad learning to ply as well as fear his savage-tempered, domineering father; the timid, uncomplaining mother with instincts of refinement; the silent, knowing uncles and the comically voluble one. They are truly and shrewdly depicted, but they are drawn from stock, none the less.

Janni Howker is a writer of considerable power: she knows how to sting and how to suggest. She is also a writer of real passion, and one can see her in this book staking out a parallel ground to that of Alan Garner's *Stone Book Quartet*. She too is not content that the lives of the labouring classes should be described in the words and rhythms of the governing and recording classes. This book has neither the resonance nor the assured economy of the *Stone Book Quartet*; but in the cadences and cross-cutting of its dialogue, and in its sense of the emotions behind words, it provokes the comparison.

INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

- Ahlright, David. Tennyson: The Muses' tug-of-war 1274
Austen, Caroline. Reminiscences 1284
Beckett, Samuel. The Complete Dramatic Works 1281
Ben-Zvi, Lindu, Samuel Beckett 1281
Berevitch, Susan, and Myra Jehlen (Editors). Ideology and Classic American Literature 1273
Blake, Lord, and C. S. Nichols (Editors). The Dictionary of National Biography 1971–1980 1263
Blunt, Wilfrid. Slow on the Feather: Further autobiography 1938–1959 1266
Boyes, Roger, and John Moody. The Priest Who Had to Die 1269
Brater, Enoch (Editor). Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context 1281
Colder, John, Martin Esslin, Billie Whitelaw, David Warrell and others. As No Other Days Fall: For Samuel Beckett on his 80th birthday 1281
Calderwood, James L. If It Were Done: "Macbeth" and tragic action 1273
Davidson, Basil. The Story of Africa 1285
Eilmann, Richard. Samuel Beckett: Noyman of Noland 1281
Empson, William. Essays on Shakespeare 1271
The Royal Bess and Other Works 1272
Goldstein, Laurence. The Flying Machine and Modern Literature 1273
Goldthorpe, Rhannon. Sartre: Literature and theory 1273
Granger, J. H. Patriotisms: Britain 1900–1939 1264
Grey, J. David (Editor). The Jane Austen Handbook 1284
Halg, Stirling. Flambert and the Gift of Speech 1273
Hamilton, Charles. In Search of Shakespeare: A study of the poet's life and handwriting 1273
Harden, Edgar. Thackeray's "English Humourists" and "Four Georges" 1283
Heller, Joseph, and Speed Vogel. No Laughing Matter 1266
Howker, Janni. Isaac Campion 1291
Ingham, Kenneth. Jon Christian Smith: The conscience of a South African 1286
Ingraham, Richard. John Stewart Collis: A memoir 1266
Jones, James T. Wayward Skeptic: The theories of R. P. Blackman 1273
Katz, Jacob. The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's anti-Semitism 1270
Keefe, Terry. French Existentialist Fiction 1280
Kerr, Fergus. Theology after Wittgenstein 1289
Kezich, Laila. Composition with Dark Centre 1290
Kilworth, Garry. Witchwater Country 1291
King, Clive. The Sound of Propellers 1291
Mazur, All. The Africans: A triple heritage 1285
Meredith, Martin. The First Dance of Freedom: Black Africa in the postwar era 1285
Moravia, Alberto. The Voyeur 1290
Nabholz, John R. "My Reader My Fellow-Labourer": A study of English Romantic prose 1273
Nairn, Bede, and Geoffrey Serle (Editors). Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume Ten: 1891–1939 Lat-Ner 1263
Orton, Joe. The Orton Diaries 1266
O'Sullivan, Noel (Editor). Terrorism. Ideology and Revolution 1268
Pasolini, Pier Paolo. The Ragazzi 1290
Pellason, Timothy. Reading "In Memoriam" 1274
Prater, Donald. A Ringing Glass: The life of Rainer Maria Rilke 1265
Quiroga, Eduardo. On Foreign Ground 1290
Rodley, Lyn. Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia 1288
Rousseau, Philip. Pachomius: The making of a community in fourth-century Egypt 1288
Runzo, Joseph. Reason. Relativism and God 1289
Sagan, Ell. At the Dawn of Tynnyan 1269
Scott, James C. Weapons of the Weak 1287
Shatto, Susan (Editor). Tennyson's "Maud": A definitive edition 1274
Sheringham, Michael. Beckett – "Molly" 1281
Shinfeld, Alan. Alfred Tennyson 1274
Slaven, Anthony, and Sydney Checkland. Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography 1860–1960. Volume One: The Staple Industries 1263
Sulton, Peter, and Lulse Hericus (Editors). This is What Happened: Historical narratives by Aborigines 1287
Sykes, Alan, J. H. Grainer. Patriotisms: Britain 1900–1939 1264
Townshend, Charles. Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the twentieth century 1268
Ungar, Sanford J. Africa: The nations and people of the secret continent 1285
Ushorne, Karen. "Elizabeth": The author of "Elizabeth and her German Garden" 1265
Vargas Llosa, Mario. The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta 1290
Wang, Hao. Beyond Analytic Philosophy 1289
Williams, Michael. Jane Austen: Six novels and their methods 1284